Polish Journal for American Studies
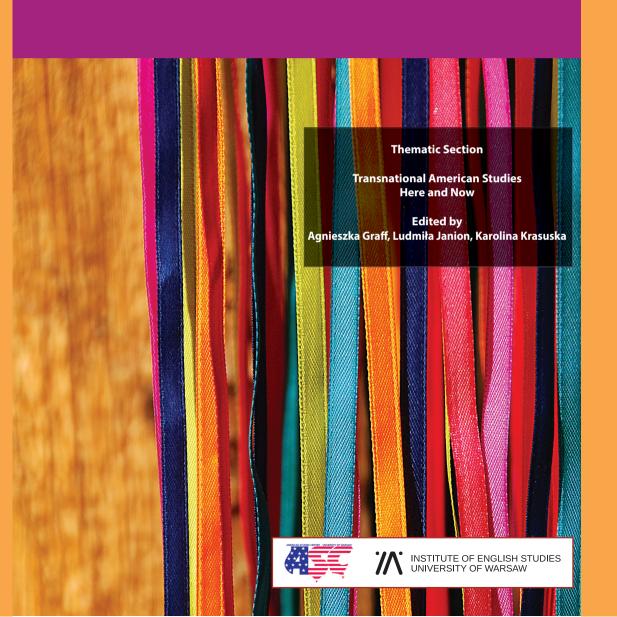
Yearbook of the Polish Association for American Studies

Vol. 12 (Spring 2018)

Thematic Section

**Transnational American Studies
Here and Now**

**Edited by
Agnieszka Graff, Ludmiła Janion, Karolina Krasuska**

Polish Journal for American Studies

Yearbook of the Polish Association for American Studies

Vol. 12 (Spring 2018)

Warsaw 2018

TYPESETTING AND COVER DESIGN
Miłosz Mierzyński

COVER IMAGE
Jerzy Durczak, "Colors for Sale" from the series "Santa Fe." By permission.
http://www.flickr.com/photos/jurek_durczak/

Table of Contents

Thematic Section
Transnational American Studies Here and Now

Edited by
Agnieszka Graff, Ludmiła Janion, Karolina Krasuska

Agnieszka Graff, Tomasz Basiuk, Karolina Krasuska

Introduction
Transnational American Studies:
Histories, Methodologies, Perspectives

For several decades—notably, since the turn of the twenty-first century—the field of American studies has been expanding beyond its long established intellectual framing by adopting a consciously transnational approach, as well as a more determined interdisciplinary approach. This change is not just one in scope, but one in political orientation. The "transnational turn" is above all a turn away from American exceptionalism. Each of the essays included in this thematic cluster addresses transnationalism: some do so explicitly, as their theme, others rely on it as a conceptual frame. They all originated as papers presented at the conference of the Polish Association for American Studies titled *Transnational American Studies: Histories, Methodologies, Perspectives* held at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw in October 2016. The present introduction begins with a brief overview of the various "turns" that preceded and led to the transnational turn; it offers a definition of transnationalism as a theoretical perspective in American studies and goes on to ask what the field's evolution has implied in the cultural/intellectual/political context of post-1989 Europe, especially Poland. To what extent has it affected hierarchies of knowledge production and distribution? How has the promise of transnationalism resonated with Polish Americanists? Have we accepted the political impulse behind it—its anti-exceptionalism, critiqued by some as anti-Americanism? Our aim is not to offer conclusive answers to these questions, but rather to provoke critical reflection and debate. It is our belief that scholarship benefits from occasional methodological self-scrutiny and that the transnational turn has had sufficient resonance to occasion such historicizing reflection and discursive re-constitution of the field. Needless to say, the meaning of transnationalism in American studies depends on who is asking, as well as when and where the question is asked.

Paradigms, Turns, Perspectives Prior to the Transnational Turn

Vernon Louis Parrington wrote in *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927) that he has "chosen to follow the broad path of our political, economic, and social development, rather than the narrower belletristic" (xvii). Thereby, he prospectively defined American studies as interdisciplinary while implicitly affirming the primacy of U.S. perspectives and assuming that the audience would be American, as well (consider the pronoun "our" in this quote). The project was thus quite different from

José Marti's "Nuestra America" and even opposed to it. The field has since fared particularly well at the crossroads of literature and history, without usually venturing to other disciplines, as evidenced also by the work of the generation of scholars that followed the founders, including the literary scholar F.O. Matthiessen and the historian Perry Miller. History and literature were the unquestioned center of scholarly interest for the myth-and-symbol school, whose founders include Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, and John William Ward—their main preoccupation was to capture and define what made American culture special, different, in short—exceptional.

Revisionary positions adopted by Annette Kolodny, Richard Slotkin, and Alan Trachtenberg critiqued the myth-and-symbol style of doing American studies for neglecting minority perspectives for the sake of a unifying national vision, especially as embodied in the frontier myth and the pastoral tradition, and for reiterating the notion of American exceptionalism.[1] With the notable exception of Trachtenberg, these critics remained firmly rooted in literary studies. A shift towards interdisciplinarity began in the 1970s: as sociology and anthropology gradually rose in significance within American studies, the concept of "culture" inherited from literary studies was being displaced by the anthropological understanding of "culture" as a way of life. This change, to a large extent owed to the influence of Raymond Williams, was one in both method and object of scholarly interest: popular culture, media, film, and material culture joined the classics of American literature as "texts" worthy of serious study. It was also an institutional change: literary scholars were now cohabiting the field and exchanging ideas with academics trained in anthropology and sociology, as well as media and film studies.[2]

Theoretical paradigms (some would say: fads) followed one another rapidly. Structuralism came to American studies in the mid-1970s—thus rather late—giving a "scientific" underpinning to arguments that had heretofore been framed in myth-and-symbol terms.[3] As a latecomer, structuralism was soon overshadowed by post-

---

1   If *Virgin Land* by Henry Nash Smith (1950) remains the classic foundational text, then Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land* (1975) appears to us as the single most noteworthy revisionist text from the 1970s. A powerful re-thinking of the pastoral tradition, it also remains remarkably readable and teachable even after nearly half a century. Its significance is also as a classic in American gender studies; Kolodny demonstrated the centrality of gender in shaping U.S. myth/ideology, thus anticipating many later developments at the intersection of American studies and gender and queer studies.

2   For a self-narrative about Americanization of cultural studies, see: Grossman, Denning, "Culture and the Crisis"; Budd, Entman, Steinman, "The Affirmative Character of U.S. Cultural Studies." A good mainstream guide to the directions of the constant development of American (cultural) studies is an ongoing project by NYU Press—an ever expanding version of the publication by Burgett, Hendler: http://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/.

3   One brilliant example is Will Wright's *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (1975). The book remains remarkably readable today as a perceptive reading of Westerns, despite its dated methodology.

structuralism and, by the mid-1980s, the entire "linguistic turn" had been displaced by the "cultural turn," i.e. by approaches drawn from ethnography, socio-anthropology, and various brands of neo-Marxism.[4] Feminism became influential not only as a way of re-reading the tradition but also as a force that redefined it; to re-read the great male authors with gender in mind and to add women authors to the canon was to reconsider the meaning of what has made America "exceptional" and to put this very idea in perspective.[5]

By the late 1980s American studies had fully joined the UK-born international intellectual movement known as cultural studies. "Ideology," "discourse" and "hegemony" were now key conceptual tools; Foucault, Althusser, Hall, and Gramsci became unavoidable points of reference. The business of searching for what makes America different from the rest of the world was giving way to a new pursuit: that of tracing and interpreting the dynamics of power as it manifests itself in U.S. culture. The concept of social construction of identity and a new approach to race (or "race," as some scholars insisted), eventually resulting in critical race studies, were major preoccupations.[6] "Transnationalism" had not yet been named as a theoretical perspective, but the various "turns" were already pointing in that direction by questioning the paradigm of a naturalized national identity.

Defining the "Transnational Turn"

The transnational turn was predicated on a critique of American exceptionalism and a rejection of an imaginary homogeneity of cultural memory that the field had produced. Central to it was a call that scholars acknowledge, on the one hand,

---

4   Michael Denning's provocative essay "'The Special American Conditions': Marxism and American Studies" (1986), very influential at the time, is perhaps worth mentioning here as both a survey of Marxian approaches to U.S. culture produced up till then, and an important Marxist argument against American exceptionalism (notably, against the idea that there is no class struggle in the United States).

5   Let us mention two 1980s texts that constitute both feminist classics and fascinating meta-texts of the masculinist bias of what was then American studies: Nina Baym's "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" (1985) and Jane Tomkins' "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History" (1985).

6   Emblematic of this stage are two collections: *Ideology and Classic American Literature* edited by Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (1988) and *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates (1986). Many of the essays collected in these volumes remain classics of American studies, but they also testify to the intense political engagement that accompanied the mid-1980s preoccupation with discourse, ideology, and the social construction of race. Arguably, the single most influential book of the period was Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986). Since then critical race studies has occupied a central position in (transnational) American studies. Another related study, paving the way towards critical whiteness studies, was George Lipsitz's *The Possesive Investment in Whiteness* (1998).

the plurality of histories obscured by the term "American" and, on the other hand, the imperial status of the U.S. along with the ways in which exceptionalism served this status and shaped culture. In a useful survey of these developments published in 2012, John Carlos Rowe demonstrates that the shift towards "New" American studies was essentially the result of a critique of American studies as Cold-War area studies. This critique had been brewing for quite a while, as the above overview illustrates. Rowe credits especially the work done in the mid-1980s by Donald Pease and others, who showed "how American Studies participated in Cold War ideology, especially its articulation of an American Exceptionalism" (89). And yet, however far we search for its intellectual roots, that critique led to a paradigm change only when Americanists took note of the relevance of postcolonial theory to U.S. history. The mental map was re-drawn thanks to Paul Gilroy's seminal *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). In Rowe's words, Gilroy "fundamentally challenged 'area studies' definitions of Caribbean, African American, and black British communities, directing us both literally and figuratively to the 'Atlantic world' in which transnational flows of people, goods, and cultures moved incessantly and diversely" (101).

Two programmatic texts by leading U.S. Americanists seem worth mentioning here: Amy Kaplan's 1993 essay "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture" and Janice Radway 1998 presidential address to the American Studies Association. Kaplan demonstrated how, from Perry Miller's "errand into the wilderness" onwards, American studies had evaded the fact that the United States is an empire. This blindness, she argued, had been crippling to the field, as the imperial status had an enormous impact on cultural productions.[7] Radway's presidential address raised the question of the exceptionalism inscribed in the field's very name and explored possible alternatives. Reprinted as the opening text in the New Americanists' signature anthology, *The Futures of American Studies*, the essay is thus introduced by the volume's editors:

> Radway's essay challenges the naturalization of such categories as the nation-state and questions the reification of the American studies movements as a single unitary culture.… *America, Americanness, and Americanization*: all these terms have their own intelligibility. By raising the question of the name, Radway challenged practitioners in the field to account for how the unintelligible and unrepresentable can be brought to bear on the field. (Pease and Wiegman 23-24)

The transnational turn, then, grows out of a need to redirect and re-orient scholarly work: away from previously assumed coherence of what used to be called the

---

7   Kaplan eventually developed her argument into a book-length study: *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (2002). The book shows how U.S. imperialism—from "Manifest Destiny" to the "American Century"—shaped American culture.

"American mind" and away from the complacency brought about by the comforting idea that America is a "stable container of social antagonisms" (Radway 53). The challenge was to truly acknowledge the problems posed by American exceptionalism and imperialism; to confront their consequences for the field of American studies. The very idea of "the common ground" at the heart of liberalism had to be rejected because, to cite Radway again, "the liberal solution to the question of difference has increasingly been made untenable, by the new work on race especially, but also by work on sexuality, ethnicity, gender, and class" (52).

At the heart of the transnational turn is thus an anti-national and anti-liberal political orientation, one that has been celebrated by many on the left while it has also been critiqued as anti-American.[8] The movement's valorization of academic work with explicit political commitment is exemplified by the section titles in *The Futures of American Studies*: Posthegemonic, Comparativist, Differential, and Counterhegemonic.

Transnationalism received renewed impetus with the 2000 election of George W. Bush as President and with U.S. interventions in Asia in the wake of 9/11. Prompted by these developments, sometimes in an overt gesture of protest, scholars revived the debate about America's exceptionalism. The 2004 American Studies Association Presidential Address by Shelley Fisher Fishkin provides one of the examples of the beginning centrality of the term "transnationalism" in American studies. The founding of major American studies journals with a new transnational focus is another prominent example: *Comparative American Studies* dates back to 2003 whereas *Transnational American Studies*, co-founded by Fischer Fishkin, started appearing in 2009. Speaking from the standpoint of Polish American studies, it is worth noting that that the initial issue of *Transnational American Studies* featured an article by a Polish scholar, Andrzej Antoszek.

As the above historical sketch suggests, the debate was not exactly new to Americanists. What was new was the sense of political commitment and urgency. If the U.S. was violently re-asserting itself as an empire with exceptionalism legitimating military interventions, Americanists were responding by tracing the roots of these developments in U.S. culture and situating the U.S. in determined political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. Rowe devotes an entire chapter to recent productions of the culture industry which strove to justify U.S. military interventions. He argues that

> there is an important relationship between the emergence of U.S. military power, along with the complementary threats of inequitable and repressive policies toward peoples (especially but not exclusively non-U.S. citizens) at home and abroad, and the capitalization of

---

8   Alan Wolfe, "Anti-American Studies," *The New Republic* (February 10, 2003). For a discussion of this text, see Rob Kroes's article in this issue. More recently, a dismissal of liberalism has been practiced by the right as a boost to nationalism.

> 'cultural exports' ranging from Hollywood entertainment and television programming to digital technologies and their protocols for communication, work, and social 'networking.' (111-112)

Concluding his analysis, Rowe articulates an explicitly political aim for "new" American studies:

> It is time for us to think differently about how 'history' is and has been made, to count the 'local' as well as the 'global,' and to develop new institutions, not simply interpretive methods, to negotiate the inevitable conflicts of such histories. Without such critical knowledge, there is likely to be unending terror from all sides in a new era of global warfare only one stage of which is being enacted in the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its ongoing war in Afghanistan. (130)

Writing in 2012 Rowe may not be entirely representative in his sense of urgency or in his prophesy of "unending terror from all sides." For the most part, Barrack Obama's presidency provoked more positive intellectual responses because of an apparent return to multilateralism. But how do we think of transnational American studies vis-à-vis the vehemence of Donald Trump running against Hillary Clinton? What difference does the Trump presidency make to the debates on American exceptionalism?

In October 2016, just before our conference took place, a commentator for *The New York Times*, reflecting on the upcoming U.S. elections, expressed his view of how the ongoing campaign had left behind the old cultural wars, replacing them with a new divide, one that is already familiar in Europe but less so in America: "This election is a hint of one way things could turn next: a new split between the beneficiaries of multicultural globalism and the working-class ethno-nationalists who feel left behind, both economically and culturally. It wouldn't divide the country as much by region and religion, but more along the lines of urbanization and education" (Cohn). We are presented here with an idea which in 2016 was still scrambling for the best terms in which to express itself, i.e., the question of economic versus cultural factors' impact on the election. Were the disillusioned voters indeed working-class, or were they perhaps also former members of the middle class? Is an "ethno-nationalist" code for a white supremacist, or does it mean something else, an isolationist perhaps? What are the structures of feeling of those who felt left behind? How exactly do urbanization and education match up, if they do? And what about the hoary term "multicultural globalism," whose alleged beneficiaries are being opposed to "working-class ethno-nationalists"? Such questions are at the heart of Arlie Hochschild's enormously influential study *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2016). Her ethnography explores the structures of feeling behind the rise of right-wing populism, white angst, and white resentment that would lead Trump into the White House. A remarkable effort to understand what has happened to America, the book

was an immediate bestseller and remained one for months. But given Hochschild's determination to search for a coherent explanation of what had happened, is the book in tune with recent developments in American studies that have resisted any presumption of national coherence? Or should we perhaps be asking whether American studies, as defined by the "transnational turn" of the mid-1990s, with its vehement rejection of liberalism, remains an adequate response to the crisis of liberalism experienced (not only) by America today?

European Perspectives on the Transnational Turn

European Americanists had, of course, participated in all the shifts and transitions that preceded the transnational turn, contributing theoretically informed and innovative scholarship. The new development meant that our position *as* Europeans became significant because we were affording an outside perspective. The transnational turn brought the question of location into the center. The project of escaping "the tenacious grasp of American exceptionalism," as Kaplan put it in the title of a 2004 essay, implied a serious invitation for outsiders, a call for comparative perspectives.

The new framework appeared promising. It invited discussions of American influences on European unification. It placed the current immigrant crisis against the backdrop of American history, political system, and the way the U.S. has integrated some of its constituent minorities. Conversely, the U.S. was to be regarded not as unique but as occupying a determined place in the global economy and in the international system. Transnationalism also implied a re-assessment of critical readings of America by outsiders—a long-standing tradition that includes Alexis de Tocqueville and a multitude of others, Henryk Sienkiewicz and Bernard-Henri Lévy among them. Europeans might have things to say just as did American expatriates, such as Henry James, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, and James Baldwin, and as did those Americans whose perspective was influenced by their travels abroad, such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain. Indigenous dissenters have offered and inspired a range of critical insights that might lend themselves to comparative readings and to being discussed from the vantage point of transnational American studies.

Such an invitation was in fact extended. Among the several suggestions for a new name for the American Studies Association offered by Radway two decades ago was "International Association for the Study of the United States." This name, she suggested, would "acknowledge the fact that analysis of the United States and its history, people and cultures is not carried out solely within the borders of this country" (61). Yet, as Radway goes on to admit, "the work of international scholars is still often cordoned off in special international panels rather than integrated with panels that feature United States-based scholars" (61). This, we are sad to say, has not changed all that much since then (and neither, by the way, has ASA's name). Moreover, few U.S. based scholars grace American studies conferences outside the U.S. with their presence. Though this may not be a matter of choice or bias, but

rather of funding and the distribution of prestige, the fact remains that "transnational American studies" may be anti-national in theory but remains a U.S.-based pursuit.

The transnational turn is thus not a happy ending to a turbulent story; rather, it is itself a phenomenon at the intersection of politics and academia, one that needs to be contextualized and historicized. The transnational approach means placing the U.S. squarely in the global context rather than beginning with the premise of its special role, but European scholars have been somewhat skeptical about the U.S. relinquishing its central position in the seeming gesture of self-divestiture. Some have suggested that the 'transnational turn' is, paradoxically, a remarkably American phenomenon, one provoked by and implicated in political debates and developments of the last two decades. For instance, Winfried Fluck asks about the uses of the transnational perspective and notes its necessary, however critical, co-dependence with the national:

> The transnational can… not be separated from the national from which it takes its point of departure. In effect, one constitutes the other, and both remain interdependent. Seen from this perspective, transnational American studies, despite their own programmatic claims to go beyond the American nation-state, also imply theories for and about 'America.' (366-367)

Also, writing in 2011, Fluck already advocates for examining the diverse uses of the transnational perspective that "can hide very different agendas" (366) instead of only celebrating its potential. His article testifies to the maturity of the field that can be re-categorized in its vastness and diversity, and appreciated, but at the same time critically assessed.

Also other prominent Western European Americanists, including Heinz Ickstadt and Rob Kroes, have been skeptical, sometimes even ironic, of the New Americanists' mission to abolish coherence, which they refer to as "a form of ideological (and methodological) exorcism… [designed] to drive out the bad spirits of nationalism, to get out of the national frame, which, in a sense, is the very frame in which American studies developed" (Ickstadt interview, 21). Kroes makes a similar point in the present volume: "adherents of the New American Studies set upon the 'de-construction' of their own academic field with a vengeance. At times their efforts showed a vehemence as if the issue was a matter of exorcism, of driving out all the evil connotations of the word 'America,' in an act of linguistic voluntarism, as if changing the language one used would change the world."

Interviewed in 2006, Ickstadt was hopeful about what he called the ongoing internationalization of American studies, wherein scholars from Europe, Asia, and Latin America were finally being invited into a dialogue with U.S. Americanists on equal terms "and not merely [as] imitators, followers from the Americanist provinces or diasporas" (21). Over a decade later, we might ask whether a true internationalization has taken place. From the standpoint of the Polish academy,

two aspects of the transnational turn seem problematic: its interdisciplinarity and its political engagement. Most Americanists attending the annual conferences of the Polish Association for American Studies come from English departments and are literary scholars, some of whom have ventured into film studies or cultural studies. Efforts to attract social scientists—sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists—have been only moderately successful, even though three American studies departments (at the University of Warsaw, the Jagiellonian University, and the University of Łódź) include social scientists among their permanent faculty and offer social science curricula. Nonetheless, the sheer numerical prevalence of literary scholars determines the field's character as predominantly literary, prompting the few social scientists working on the U.S. to attend conferences in their respective fields rather than the specifically Americanist gatherings. An annual graduate conference on U.S. history takes place outside the framework of the PAAS, for example.

Little emphasis has been placed on extending the field beyond the study of the U.S., and almost no bilingual or multilingual programs exist. Most American studies curricula are offered in English or in Polish (or a combination of both), typically leaving out Spanish and the other languages of North America and of Latin America. Canadian studies is a notable exception, although the curricula are usually minimal and rarely include both anglo- and francophone courses. The Jagiellonian in Cracow has recently begun to offer a hemispheric American studies curriculum at the BA level that is taught in Polish, and the University of Warsaw will soon implement a hemispheric curriculum at the MA level, taught in English and Spanish. These are the most notable harbingers of a transnational approach to American studies, however differently conceived from the transnational turn that remains focused primarily on the U.S.

As for political engagements, the debates and silences engaging West European Americanists may have been motivated in part by anti-American sentiment prompted by George W. Bush and by American anti-Europeanism. The position of Eastern European Americanists has been different for obvious historical reasons. At the risk of oversimplification, a generational split may be observed. A number of scholars remain attached to the literary paradigm of American studies because they are highly skeptical of the politicization of academia. Formal literary readings, even if combined with a historicizing approach, are well enough entrenched to offer the kind of intellectual autonomy that has been invaluable in the face of Cold War era ideology and that may still be important today. Moreover, these scholars are often skeptical of what Rob Kroes in his article in this volume critically describes as 'linguistic volunteerism': the conviction that calling things by new names can significantly change the distribution of power, or even of knowledge. By contrast, a number of mid-career scholars and many younger ones are pursuing critical race studies, feminism, queer studies, and so on. They are actively participating in the new American studies paradigms of which transnationalism is a facet. Their intellectual preferences—as well as, to a growing degree, their education—predispose them

to these pursuits, making it almost unthinkable that an Americanist earning her doctorate in Poland today might opt for a formal reading of cultural texts without engaging some political angle. Recent publications show the engagement of American studies scholars working in Poland with various iterations of the transnational approach (cf. e.g. Ferens; Desmond and Dominguez).

The above distinction is approximate at best, but it gets at the point of the debate. To illustrate the kind of discrepancy at work here, let us recall an anecdote, related by Marek Wilczyński in his contribution to the Politics of American Studies issue of *The Americanist* (2006): "When at the… EAAS conference in Nicosia, Cyprus, Donald Pease made a reference to Stalin as a precursor of today's critique of American exceptionalism, an elder colleague of mine, who was sitting in the audience behind me, whispered right into my ear, 'He is insulting us.' Indeed he was, no matter if totally unaware of the problem" (50). This exchange indicates that historical determinations cannot be simply ignored or escaped. Moreover, the recent turn to illiberalism in Poland and elsewhere suggests that one would only ignore them at one's peril.

***

The five articles in this thematic section mirror these various modes and points of evolution of the transnational perspective on American studies sketched above. They include more theoretically-oriented contributions directly resonating with the issues raised in this introduction; such is the case with Rob Kroes's and Tadeusz Rachwał's articles. The remaining articles—by Piotr Skurowski, Grzegorz Welizarowicz, and Florian Zappe—provide case studies of various iterations of the transnational. Together they are an illuminating illustration of how the way we think and write is inevitably affected both by geographical location and institutional and disciplinary contexts.

Rob Kroes's contribution "Transnational American Studies: Exceptionalism Revisited," with which this section begins, is a critical appreciation of the field of transnational American studies. Kroes's argument proceeds in three steps: he traces the contemporary use of "American exceptionalism" first in political discourse (notably its critical usage by Barack Obama), and, second, in American studies since the 1990s. By engaging these two spheres, Kroes is able to showcase the political engagement inherent in self-understanding of American studies in the U.S. and a considerable part of (Western) Europe. Also, focusing on scholarly criticism on American exceptionalism, Kroes provides a narrative of the recent development of transnational American studies that is complementary to that present in this introduction. However, he also directly points to the aporias present in this approach that he terms "linguistic voluntarism"; thus he self-reflexively interrogates the limits of political agency of discursive procedures. In the third step, Kroes—drawing on his own recent work—projects a vision of "methodological transnationalism" or "mental intertextuality." Kroes alludes here to phenomenology talking about "forms

of transnationalism inherent to the workings of the human mind" in which various linguistic and visual texts are juxtaposed beyond the constraints of a national exceptionalist imaginary.

The essay by Tadeusz Rachwał "Where East Meets West: On Some Locations of America" is an interesting effort that implicitly brings together the two styles of thinking about American studies characteristic for American and, to some extent, Western European on the one hand and post-socialist East-European academia on the other (as we suggest above, in Poland, it is also a matter of generational differences). Rachwał engages in an exploration of the metaphoric (aesthetic) forms of discourse about territorial expansion, examining the aesthetic dimension of political imagination. Rachwał's position is close to Kroes's critique of linguistic volunteerism, but they are also different in that they address different academic audiences. Rachwał remains focused on aesthetics because he is writing in an academic context in which the field is defined as that of aesthetic, rather than overtly political, analysis. In other words, while Kroes is speaking to Americanists who have accepted the politicization of their field as inevitable and necessary, and who want to address political issues directly, Rachwał functions in an academic environment which traditionally shuns political engagement, regarding them as ideological and reductionist. The ethos of the humanities in post-socialist Eastern Europe involves a careful avoidance of instrumentalization of culture for historical reasons. The academic field perceives itself as a guardian of transhistorical values against the violence of politics. Rachwał's essay may be read as an effort to break through this paradigm but in a way that respects the discursive protocols of the field in the region.

The third article in this sequence—Piotr Skurowski's "Looking Back, 2018-1916: The Cosmopolitan Idea in Randolph Bourne's 'Transnational America'"— revisits Bourne's titular essay, which features also in the conclusion of Rachwał's contribution. Skurowski performs what we could call an empathic reading of Bourne's essay, trying to disentangle how his original contribution reads in the context of the times which he, referring to Mitchell Cohen, puts into to rubric of "rooted cosmopolitanism." Significantly, Skurowski puts Bourne in dialogue with his contemporaries, namely Horace Kallen, but also with W.E.B. Du Bois. Hence, Bourne emerges as a highly ambivalent figure that can be read as a "forerunner" of today's "transnationalism," but whose texts also showcase a decisive class, gender, and racial bias.

Grzegorz Welizarowicz's "Feel Like a Gringo: Transnational Consciousness in Los Angeles Punk Rock songs," may be read as a variation on the theme of rooted cosmopolitanism, but engages a very different type of cultural texts. Analyzing a regional assemblage of punk rock songs written and performed by local bands, including Chicano/a artists, Welizarowicz speaks to American studies in the tradition of (British) cultural studies focusing, among others, on subcultures. Yet, the brand of transnationalism employed in this article is not about the transatlantic connection to British punk rock, as the author makes explicitly clear, but rather is located in the

very material analyzed. He argues that the borderlands help to produce "a radical transcultural sensibility" that found its vehicle in punk rock, both in its diasporically transnational guise and as a transnational political self-critique of the white mainstream.

In his contribution titled "The Other Exceptionalism: A Transnational Perspective on Atheism in America," Florian Zappe returns to some of the theoretical considerations of "transnationalism" that are at the heart of Rob Kroes's contribution while looking at the position of religion and the tradition of disbelief in the U.S. Relying on Robert Bellah's concept of "American civil religion" and viewing religion in terms of cultural imaginary (Castoriadis), Zappe analyzes the distinct version of atheism that developed in America. He reads the soft or negative atheism embodied by the writings by Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, and then examines hard or positive atheism, here linked with immigrant social reformers, such as Ernestine Rose and Emma Goldman. It is thus a transnational lens that allows Zappe to complicate claims about the exceptional status of religious belief in the U.S.

"For an outside observer, the most surprising thing about current transnational American studies in the United States is that they hardly focus on such transnational reconfigurations of power"(380), concludes Winfried Fluck in 2011, suggesting that despite the assumed politicization of the field, it nevertheless falls short of the expectations of its transnational political interventions. As we see from the various articles collected here, despite the global networking of scholars, the horizon of expectation of the scholarly work in American studies in various parts of the globe and various parts of Europe may still be quite different—also depending on their very positioning within the transnational flows of power.

Works Cited

Antoszek, Andrzej. "'The Higher the Satellite, the Lower the Culture?' African American Studies in East-Central and Southeastern Europe: The Case of Poland." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1.1 (2009). Web. 15 Mar. 2018. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/05g6928h

Burgett, Bruce, and Glenn Hendler. *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York: NYU Press, 2006. Print.

Cohn, Nate. "The New Blue and Red: An Educational Split Is Replacing the Culture War", *The New York Times*, 20 Oct. 2016. Web. 14 Feb. 2018. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/20/upshot/the-new-blue-and-red-educational-split-is-replacing-the-culturewar.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=first-column-region&region=top-news&WT.nav=top-news

Baym, Nina. "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Literature Exclude Women." *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, Theory*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon, 1985. Print.

Denning, Michael. "'The Special American Conditions': Marxism and American

Studies." *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 356-380. Print.

——. "Culture and the Crisis: The Political and Intellectual Origins of Cultural Studies in the United States." *Disciplinarity and Dissent in Cultural Studies*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar. New York and London: Routledge, 1996. 265-286. Print.

Budd, Mike, Robert M. Entman, and Clay Steinman. "The Affirmative Character of U.S. Cultural Studies." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990): 169-184. Print.

Desmond, Jane C., and Virginia R. Dominguez. *Global Perspectives on the United States*. Champaign, IL., University of Illinois Press, 2017. Print.

Ferens, Dominika. *Ways of Knowing Small Places: Intersections of American Literature and Ethnography since the 1960s*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wroclawskiego, 2010. Print.

Fischer Fishkin, Shelley. "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." *American Quarterly* 57.1 (2005): 17-57. Print.

Fluck, Winfried. "A New Beginning?: Transnationalisms." *New Literary History* 42.3 (2011): 365-384. Print.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.

Grossberg, Lawrence. "The Formation(s) of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham." *Bringing It All Back Home: Essays in Cultural Studies*. Durham and London: Duke, 1997. 195-234. Print.

Hochschild, Arlie. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York: The New Press, 2016. Print.

Kaplan, Amy. "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture." *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993. 3-21. Print.

——. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.

——. "The Tenacious Grasp of American Exceptionalism: A Response to Djelal Kadir, 'Defending America Against Its Devotees.'" *Comparative American Studies* 2 (2004): 153-159. Web. 15 Mar. 2018.

Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience in American Life and Letters*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975. Print.

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. Racial Formation in the United States. New York: Routledge, 1986.

Parrington, Vernon Louis. 1927. *Main Currents in American Thought*. Vol. 1: *The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800*. Foreword by David W. Levy. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987. Print.

Pease, Donald, and Robyn Wiegman, eds. *The Futures of American Studies*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.

Radway, Jan. "'What's in a Name?' Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November, 1998." *The Futures of American Studies*. Ed. Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. 46-75. Print.

Rowe, John Carlos. *Cultural Politics of the New American Studies*. Open Humanities Press, 2012. Web. 15 March 2018.

Wright, Will. *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975. Print.

Rob Kroes

Decentering America: Visual Intertextuality
and the Quest for a Transnational American Studies

Abstract: The planned removal of a Civil War monument in Charlottesville, Virginia, was the pretext for a white supremacist rally there in August 2017. It brought American fascists back into the streets, marching under the banner of a virulent nativism, of a vicious fear of being removed from the pedestal of their proper place in society. It also brought to the minds of people watching these images on TV older visual repertoires dating back to Nazi-Germany, fascist Italy, and similar racist clashes elsewhere. In such a stream of consciousness, such a chain of visual recollections, national settings—American or otherwise—are transcended. The wandering—and wondering—mind of the observer moves in a space naturally transnational. The following essay considers the implications of such mental processes for the established forms of discourse among historians.

Keywords: exceptionalism, transnationalism, American studies, phenomenology, intertextuality, historical palimpsests, ideology

What came to my mind as a possible angle for the following discussion of transnationalism is based on an epiphany that I experienced while writing the last chapter of my recent book—*Prison Area, Independence Valley: American Paradoxes in Political Life and Popular Culture* (2015). The chapter revisits the concept of exceptionalism and argues on behalf of a version of methodological transnationalism. It does so by retracing the process that had unconsciously guided my hand when I wrote the book, a process that one might call mental intertextuality. Rereading my text, I noticed that whatever the precise topic, be it the history of the freak show and public spectacle, or the trajectory of atrocity photographs, such as Holocaust images, in my mind one image under discussion evoked related images, thematically related yet originating in different geographical and historical settings. Thus, through mental intertextuality, an argument could evolve that naturally transcended geographic, historical, and cultural borders, freely ranging in a transatlantic space. The outcome was unintentional, yet undeniably transnational.

My discussion of American exceptionalism brings out this process more clearly and presents it as a natural counter-trajectory, highlighting associative processes in our minds as inherently transgressive, circling back and forth and constantly affecting our reading of whatever is before our mental eyes. It moreover affects our reading of the concept of American exceptionalism. Letting ourselves be guided by the flow of mental intertexts, an alleged American exceptionalism gives way to transnationalism,

in much the same way that in palimpsests surface texts and images cover what went before, yet never quite erasing what lies submerged beneath them.

The following argument will highlight selected moments illustrating my confrontation with such palimpsests, scratching away the surface to find myself literally transported from one historical setting to another, confronting historical parallels, or better: a circulation of ideas and images across the Atlantic, transcending national settings and contexts.

∗∗∗

In a nationally televised speech on Syria, September 10, 2013, President Obama turned to American exceptionalism as a rallying cry in his endeavor to unite his country behind him. "America is not the world's policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong," Obama said. "But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act." These are words one might expect from a political pragmatist; they are far removed from the ringing global pitch of, say, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms. Yet, as if eager to take a leaf from Rooseveltian rhetoric, Obama went on to say: "That's what makes America different. That's what makes us exceptional." The concluding word must have brought a wry smile to some at least among his listeners. They must have recognized its use not as powerful rhetoric, but rather as formulaic, as a shibboleth granting safe passage to a man whose political credentials had never been fully accepted by a vengeful part of the American citizenry. The word *exceptional* had become the shibboleth to those in the media and the political arena who were out to de-construct and undermine the president from the moment he had entered office.

Obama may have quickly learned his lesson, paying tribute, if not lip service, to a word that was of relatively recent currency in American political discourse. The role it played, though, was similar to that of earlier passwords like Americanism and anti-Communism, as in the days of the Red Scare following World War I or in the early years of the Cold War with McCarthyism in the role of monitor and protector of the purity of the body politic. The monitoring gaze today comes once again from the political right, embodied in its lunatic fringe of the Tea Party and the Alt-Right.

Yet it would be wrong to see Obama as merely paying lip service to the word exceptionalism and all it stands for in summary of a larger American creed. Many have been the occasions, from his early presidency on, where we can see Obama revisiting the concept, not just to pay tribute and be done with it, but to consider the options it gave him to be an educator of the nation, to bring a degree of complexity to a word that too often was used as a facile trope. The way Obama used the word was very much in the vein of what Sacvan Bercovitch called the American Jeremiad, a specific form of public speech that reminds the audience of its high calling while pointing to the many ways in which it is still falling short. Listen to Obama, in 2008:

> We have a core set of values that are enshrined in our Constitution, in our body of law, in our democratic practices, in our belief in free speech and equality, that, though imperfect, are exceptional.
>
> Now, the fact that I am very proud of my country and I think that we've got a whole lot to offer the world does not lessen my interest in recognizing the value and wonderful qualities of other countries, or recognizing that we're not always going to be right, or that other people may have good ideas, or that in order for us to work collectively, all parties have to compromise and that includes us.
>
> I see no contradiction between believing that America has a continued extraordinary role in leading the world towards peace and prosperity and recognizing that leadership is incumbent, depends on, our ability to create partnerships because we can't solve these problems alone. (Obama qtd. in "The Big Lie")

In the eyes of the right, qualifying words like "though imperfect," or the call for compromise, while acknowledging that other people may have "good ideas," may already be far too subtle. But what caused them to rise in howling anger were Obama's opening words— often the only words quoted in the right's indictment: "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." As right-wing commentator Michael Barone thundered: "One cannot imagine Presidents Roosevelt, Truman or Kennedy, Eisenhower or Reagan, uttering such sentiments" (Barone qtd. in "The Big Lie").

Up against such odds, a man like Obama, politician *and* intellectual, must tack to political winds while keeping an eye on the compass of his convictions. He has kept valiantly trying to add a touch of realism and relativism to the idea of American exceptionalism, much as that very endeavor is an abomination in the eyes of the Tea Party watch dogs. To those with a historian's memory, however, it may even appear as if Obama was trying to add an almost European sense of the fallibility and frailty of human exploits to counter the more impetuous uses of exceptionalism in American political discourse. I for one could not help being reminded of C. Vann Woodward's reading of the historical experience of the American post-Civil War South as the only region in the United States to have experienced defeat and loss and to have developed a quasi-European sense of the tragic. Some of that sobering sense, I feel, is what Obama was struggling to convey to a larger American public.

There is a further irony here. If my reading of the gist of Obama's revisits of the concept of exceptionalism is correct, it would highlight a resemblance between his aims and current trends in the academic study of the United States. What C. Vann Woodward in his day had still to call a "counterpoint" to the prevailing mainstream reading of American history has now become a widespread inspiration in the fields of American history and American Studies. The urge began to be felt from the 1990s onwards to break out of a conceptual view of America as *sui generis*, as exceptional, as different in its historical experience and destiny than any other country or nation

in the world. Surely, the sense of American difference had been around for much longer and had in fact inspired explorations of the many ways in which America had proved different than other countries, though not exceptional. The best encyclopedic treatment is Seymour Martin Lipset's *American Exceptionalism*.

A comparativist, Lipset looked at areas in political and social life where America traditionally was seen as forming an exception to rules prevalent in Europe. Thus, he revisited Tocqueville's *aperçus* concerning the lasting effects of America's special historical genesis and development, and the German early twentieth-century historian and sociologist Werner Sombart's classic study on the question of why there is no socialism in the United States. They are all areas where America can be seen to offer counterpoints to European history while in other areas it moved in step with European history. Thus, America could be woven into a larger narrative of forces of social change and modernization as these affected nations on both sides of the Atlantic, each with its own peculiar quirks and twists. Yet exceptionalism—in its more demanding, exclusivist reading—is a different animal. It has taken more than a little pushing to shatter its hold on American historiography and on the American sense of identity.

In an influential essay entitled "Exceptionalism," Daniel Rodgers made the point that from the early modern era to the postcolonial present, the cultivation of sentiments of difference and superiority has been at the heart of the project of nation-state formation. Within these common terms, however, there has run a thread which, if not wholly distinct to the American complex, holds a peculiar prominence there. That is the idea of exceptionalism. Rodgers then makes the following simple, but crucial point: Exceptionalism differs from difference. Difference requires contrast; exceptionalism requires a rule. Exceptionalist claims pin one's own nation's distinctiveness to every other people's sameness—to general laws and conditions governing everything but the special case at hand. When difference is put in exceptionalist terms, the exception becomes an exemption, an exemption from the universal tendencies of history, the "normal" fate of nations, the laws of historical mechanics itself (Rodgers, "Exceptionalism").

It is implications like these, where a nation can claim to be above the general rule, if not above the law, that have inspired America's political action as much as its self-reflection. If other nations have agreed to set up an International Criminal Court, America is no party to it, refusing to abide by rules that others have subjected themselves to. Yet among American academics strong movements have occurred to do away with exceptionalism in their understanding of the driving forces behind American history. Programs aiming at "transnationalizing" or globalizing the intellectual paradigms of American history and American Studies found wide support in the main professional organizations. Daniel Rodgers published a pioneering study, entitled *Atlantic Crossings*, that illustrated the gains to be had from internationalizing the frame of interpretation. *Atlantic Crossings* is the first major account of the vibrant international networks that American reformers, Progressives and, later, New

Dealers constructed and of its profound impact on the United States from the 1870s through 1945, a story so often obscured by notions of American exceptionalism. At about the same time two collections of essays were published with the broad support of the Organization of American Historians (OAH), edited respectively by David Thelen and Thomas Bender. Both publishing projects broadly aimed at questioning the nation-centered focus of American history, as Thelen has it, or as Bender puts it: "To historicize the nation is to relate its dominant narrative, its national narrative, to other narratives that refer to both smaller histories and larger ones. That means understanding the historical production of the nation and locating it in a context larger than itself" (vii).

Words like "the historical production of the nation" betray an affinity and intellectual exchange with yet another community of students of America, those active in the intellectual domain of a self-styled American Studies. Always more open than their colleagues in academic history departments to intellectual perspectives current among cultural studies scholars, more willing to use a language that emphasizes the constructionist elements of reality, of reality as imagined and collectively formed through social interactions, American Studies people had begun to move in new directions following what was commonly referred to as "the cultural turn." It was just one of the fashionable turns they had collectively taken in recent years, turns such as the linguistic turn, the visual turn, the transnational turn. It had left some wondering how many turns it takes before the wheel is reinvented. For indeed, what seemed like a paradigm shift under the banner of the cultural turn, from a larger intellectual perspective may well be seen not as a new turn, but as a return to the wisdoms of the old Chicago School in the social sciences, with its seminal insights into social reality as the product of collective construction by all participants.

Whatever the case, adherents of the New American Studies set upon the "de-construction" of their own academic field with a vengeance. At times their efforts showed a vehemence as if the issue was a matter of exorcism, of driving out all the evil connotations of the word "America," in an act of linguistic voluntarism, as if changing the language one used would change the world. It led one outsider to scathingly speak of Anti-American Studies, in a facetious review in the *New Republic* of three examples of the new post-exceptionalist American Studies (Wolfe).[1]

It was not long, though, before sobering second thoughts came to some of the leading "New Americanists." In a piece entitled "Re-thinking 'American Studies after U.S. Exceptionalism,'" Donald Pease acknowledged the resistance to change of large swathes of reality. "Transnational American Studies aspired to remediate the discourse of U.S. exceptionalism by transnationalizing the core values of American civil society. But global civil society has neither transcended the era of the nation-state nor entered into the utopian realm of a cosmopolitan democracy.

---

1   In his piece, Wolfe reviewed Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *The Futures of American Studies*, John Carlos Rowe, *The New American Studies,* and David Noble, *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End Exceptionalism*.

Have not scholars in transnational American Studies," he asked, "overestimated the ways in which global civil society can mobilize the political energies needed to remedy the economic inequalities that globalization has engendered? Has not post-exceptionalist American Studies also ignored the U.S. state's power to describe the US as a permanent state of exception?" (22). Strange things are happening in this one paragraph. Not only does it describe the changes sought by the transnational turn in American Studies as changes in language, as if these would be enough to change the world. It betrays an attitude that I choose to call linguistic voluntarism. At the same time, the paragraph describes the intrusion of what Freud would have called the reality principle, of the hard facts of economic inequality and the permanent state of military mobilization as a quasi-enduring "state of exception." There is a remarkable return here, linked undoubtedly to the aftermath of 9/11 and the American display of what is known among military people as "full spectrum dominance," to age-old concepts like the state and the state's power, or for that matter the nation-state and its attendant nationalism. The permanent state of exception, in an ironic pun, is presented here as a product of the state's power, as the outcome of the state's power to manipulate reality for its citizenry, through such language as 'the war on terrorism,' or the threat of Jihadism. We mentioned linguistic voluntarism before, but if one needs proof of it happening, here it is, as used by the powers-that-be.

Clearly the work of "re-mapping the transnational"—the name of the series in which my book came out—is a work in progress, a long-term project. How do I see the place of my book in the larger project? For one thing, for much of my life as an academic active in American Studies at the University of Amsterdam, one continuing theme has been my study of the many ways in which American and European cultures have cross-pollinated and the ways in which cultural influences were received or resisted. Part of my interest was in issues of Americanization of European cultures or of European anti-Americanism, on either political or cultural grounds. Some chapters in my book clearly reflect that interest, while also critically revisiting it. If issues of empire and imperial sway show up in my writing there, it is clearly in response to wider intellectual concerns in the post-9/11 study of America. Issues of politics and power have forced themselves upon my mind most directly in the opening and concluding chapters of the book, on the George W. Bush administration first, on the Obama administration later. The chapters were written against the backdrop of general mood-swings, both in the U.S. and in Europe. There is one more general aspect of transnationalism, though, that I only became aware of while writing the book. In my earlier writing on American popular culture, I tried to answer questions as to what accounts for the lure and appeal of American popular culture, at home and abroad. In my latest book, though, I found that my interest had moved to the darker side of popular culture and public spectacle, even in such extreme varieties as lynchings.

I also found, more clearly than ever before, that there are forms of transnationalism inherent to the train of thought of the human mind. Addressing spectacles

and parades as forms of public entertainment, I noticed my mind wandering from circus and side-show artists parading through American small town Main Streets, to dignified Jewish citizens being forcibly paraded through German cities on the day following Kristallnacht (the night of the shattered glass) to the merriment of German onlookers, and back from there to the many photographs of public lynchings in the American South, with jolly and grimacing bystanders posing for the camera. The most notorious among this latter corpus are photographs to do with the Ku Klux Klan. After a long spell of quiescence, it reemerged into national prominence in the 1920s, reaching an all-time peak membership in 1924—a year, incidentally, that saw the dedication of various Confederate memorials, including the Robert E. Lee statue in Charlottesville, Virginia. It was its planned removal that served as pretext for the "Unite the Right"—also: "They will not replace us"—rally there, in August 2017. Stunningly, in our present day and age, it brought American fascists back in the streets, marching under the banner of a virulent nativism, of a vicious fear of being removed from the pedestal of their proper place in society. It also brought to the minds of people watching these images on TV older visual repertoires dating back to Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and similar racist clashes elsewhere. In such a stream of consciousness, such a chain of visual recollections, national settings—American or otherwise—are transcended. The wandering—and wondering—mind of the observer moves in a space naturally trans-national.

I thus found, more clearly than ever before, that there are forms of transnationalism inherent to the workings of the human mind. I became increasingly aware of my own thought processes while putting its results down on paper, in other words: my thinking reflected back on itself. If there is a methodology here, it is one that may remind us of *phenomenology*, as introduced by German philosophers like Edmund Husserl in the late nineteenth century. Thus, in my case, writing about freaks in 1930s America—some of whom had been immigrants from Germany— writing about the Lilliput town on Long Island that housed them, styled after the German medieval city of Nürnberg, brought images to my mind of Nazi Germany, its persecution of freaks, and its Nürnberg race laws. Images of the Nazi holocaust in their turn called up pictures in my mind of atrocity photographs as they had circulated in the United States after the war.

Similarly, in a piece about anthropological shows or human zoos as they were also called, immensely popular in the late nineteenth century, my argument shifted to the way that our current tastes and sensibilities now forbid us to enjoy what was popular entertainment only a century ago. The central illustration in my argument was the Buffalo Bill Wild West show (Kasson). Buffalo Bill was the supreme master in almost instantly translating recent American frontier history into spectacular entertainment. Mark Twain, connoisseur of contemporary American idioms, praised Buffalo Bill, telling him on the eve of Buffalo Bill's first European tour to England that he could show Europeans something that was authentically American. Twain chose to ignore that Buffalo Bill's Wild West show presented a sanitized version of the

American West, leaving out any reference to recent tragedies suffered by American Indians. This is the more remarkable coming from a man who was a leading voice in the international campaign protesting atrocities perpetrated in the Belgian Congo. There he could see through the self-serving lies of Belgian colonialism. Twain would have none of it; instead he wrote a biting indictment which he called "King Leopold's soliloquy." It showed real images of the atrocities inflicted on the native population, maimed and mutilated in the Belgian policy of colonial extortion. Again, putting such images alongside photographs, widely circulating, of native American suffering—showing Indians killed in the 1891 Wounded Knee massacre, among them Lakota Chief Big Foot, left on the battle field, frozen stiff in contorted poses[2]—leaves one wondering how a man like Twain could have managed to live with both versions of reality at the same time: praising Buffalo Bill's entertainment version, while closing his eyes to a history of atrocity and suffering that he so clearly saw and denounced in the Belgian case. To him there were no continuous visual associations connecting the two settings. To our modern post-colonial mind, it may be easier to move between repertoires of visual representation.

It is not only a matter, though—and I wish to emphasize this—of a process of visual associations forcing itself upon our minds. Following the same logic, the train of associations can also be linguistic, where an argument applying to one historical situation calls forth similar arguments applying to different situations. Thus, following my exploration of associated images of the American South and 1930s' Nazi Germany, a book came to my mind—which I had read as a student and had been deeply impressed by—written by Kurt Baschwitz, a German Jew who had fled from Nazi Germany to the Netherlands. From his new refuge, he became aware of the historical parallels between mob behavior in Germany and the American South and the logic behind it. In what would become a classic study in mass psychology, published in exile in Amsterdam, the author saw his analysis of processes of mob behavior confirmed in both settings, in an amazing act of creating intellectual distance to current events even as they had such immediate dramatic relevance to his own life.

What I am trying to convey is that the transnationalism that one can see happening here, is almost like a chimera, with one image shimmering through another one, as if in a palimpsest. History does form palimpsests, covering one layer of images with later ones, as if on the wall of an old house with one painted advertisement not quite covering a preceding one. It is an uncanny experience when, by looking intently at one image, another one shows up in one's mind, shimmering through, taking you from one locale and time to another. It is also an exhilarating experience, a sense of being literally transported in an exercise of transnationalism.

_____

2   The clash of visual memories is particularly poignant here. The picture of chief Big Foot's dead body in the snow has become iconic of the fate of American Indians as a "vanishing race." It vies for pride of place in public memory with the image of his half-brother, chief Sitting Bull, briefly a star attraction of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show, photographed in full regalia, side by side with William "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

Transnationalism as an Antidote to Exceptionalism?

Transnationalism, as here conceived, is a mental process as well as an intellectual exercise that we may use to resist the attractive force of exceptionalism. To give it that thrust, we need to take it away from its private, almost aesthetic, qualities. We can indeed enjoy these, intrigued by the flow of images as it runs before our inner eyes, following its own associative logic. But more is needed to turn it from a mere solipsistic act, not unlike the pleasure offered by the virtual worlds of a 3-D helmet, into an intellectual perspective. A measure of analytic control is needed to guide the associative flow and make it serve the point and purpose of an argument.

If the point is to confront transnationalism and exceptionalism, one obvious first step would be to zoom out from any specific instance of exceptionalism and to see it as just one case among many others. This is precisely what Obama did, conceiving of American exceptionalism as a specific case within the larger category—the larger *genus*—of national exceptionalisms. Hovering above the fray, in the manner of the true transnational mind, he showed American exceptionalism its place. The vehemence of the reaction to this perspective affirmed the rival reading of American exceptionalism as purely *sui generis*, as being one of a kind. This is what Daniel Rodgers made clear in his revisit of the concept of exceptionalism. In this extreme version, American exceptionalism comes to stand in logical opposition to transnationalism. In that version too, it turns from an analytic perspective into a national ideology, no longer open to disinterested discussion and intellectual debate. It becomes a password in the heated national debate setting insiders apart from outsiders. As such it is only the latest stage in a national pastime as old as the American nation, at whatever stage of its historical formation.

Transnationalism, then, appears as an unlikely contender for national self-reflection in the United States at its present stage. It is too relativistic, too ironic, to sustain and reflect the current national mood. For the time being it may well have to pull back inside the walls of academia. It may be a while before the United States finds a president as open-minded, as cosmopolitan, as the one who served two full terms in the White House, from 2008 to 2016.

Works Cited

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978. Print.

Baschwitz, Kurt. *Du und die Masse: Studien zu einder exakten Massenpsychologie*. Amsterdam: Feikema, Carelsen en Co., 1938. Print.

Bender, Thomas, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002. Print.

Kasson, Joy S. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. Print.

Kroes, Rob. *Prison Area, Independence Valley: American Paradoxes in Political Life and Popular Culture*. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2015. Print.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997. Print.

Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria." 10 Sep. 2013. Web. 30 Nov. 2016. https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria

Pease, Donald. "Rethinking 'American Studies after U.S. Exceptionalism.'" American Literary History 21.1 (2009): 19–27. Web. 30 Nov. 2016.

Rodgers, Daniel T. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Print.

———. "Exceptionalism," *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*. Ed. Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. 21-40. Print.

"The Big Lie." The Daily Dish, *The Atlantic*. 9 Nov. 2010. Web. 30 Nov. 2016.

Thelen, David, ed. *The Journal of American History,* A Special Issue "The Nation and Beyond," 86.3 (1999). Print.

Wolfe, Alan, "Anti-American Studies." *The New Republic*. 10 Feb. 2003. Web. 30 Nov. 2016.

Woodward, C. Vann. *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964. Print.

———. *The Burden of Southern History*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993. Print.

Tadeusz Rachwał

Where East Meets West: On Some Locations of America

Abstract: The paper offers a reading of the westward movement of the American frontier as a passage to an imaginary land in which the actual topographical displacement is accompanied by various, sometimes contradictory, images of the future. The settlers envisioned various Americas, the visions coming from their own experiences as well as from the stereotypically European projection of America as a paradise and as an object of possession. Such, sometimes contradictory, visions are noticeable in attempts at conceptualizing the frontier and its significance not only (explicitly) by Turner, but also less directly by such writers and thinkers as Thoreau, Whitman, or Bourne. Their Americas are in fact imaginary constructs reworking the encounter of East and West, frequently mixing not only discovery with invention, but also relocating, like Whitman in "Passage to India," two of the cardinal directions of the world and thus, as it were, "transnationalizing" America.

Keywords: frontier, topography, wilderness, H. D. Thoreau, F. J. Turner, W. Whitman.

> You may name it America, but it is not America.
> —Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*

John Donne, quite a long time ago now, compared his mistress going to bed (in "To His Mistress Going to Bed," 1631) to America, thus expressing his desire for a singular possession and a singular rule over a territory:

> Licence my roving hands, and let them go
> Before, behind, between, above, below.
> O, my America, my Newfoundland,
> My kingdom, safest when with one man mann'd,
> My mine of precious stones, my empery;
> How am I blest in thus discovering thee! (l. 25-30)

What appears to have incited the poet's magniloquence is the grammatically feminine gender of the name of the continent(s) which, in Donne's time, had already been discovered, though remained as yet unexplored. Columbus's work of discovery and the symbolic marriage with Vespucci, whose feminized first name America carries, go unmentioned in this well—known poem, and the discovery literally lies in the hands of the loving caresser. The name, which is a token of the conviction that America has already rightfully belonged to Europe, still awakens the need of discovery, though

the discovery is not exactly a matter of becoming recognized or identified. America is posited as an imaginary source of richness, of precious stones to be excavated from beneath the surface of her Italian name in the form of pure pleasure of individual possession of a woman.

This America of old is not a land of knowing, an object of an intellectual inquiry. Rather, it is a space of "having," the only trace of knowing being that of "manning"—perhaps in the manner Adam "manned" Eve through what King James translated by means of the verb "to know" ("And Adam knew Eve his wife," Gen. 4.1). Donne is in fact not interested in anything coming from overseas, and the woman he desires to "man" is not an American woman, but a European and perhaps an English one. The newness of this seemingly new "land" consists in her nakedness, in her becoming "unlaced" so as to reveal the "beauteous state" of the body. This state is not, as yet, an "empery," a body politic, though it will become one at the end of the poem, where the body of the naked man covers the naked body of the woman in a scene which is a peculiar scene of teaching: "To teach thee, I am naked first; why then / What needst thou have more covering than a man?" (l. 47-48). However farfetched and incongruous the metaphysical conceit may be, the project lurking in the poem seems to be quite consistent. The America which figures in it is but a bare territory, a land without Indians upon which a new world will be built by a unification of European bodies, in which "manning" of women is at the same time a kind of protective clothing and building, a covering of the land by men whose nakedness is, say, not quite naked and serves the function of sheltering and securing the nakedness of the feminine body. What is thus, though implicitly, brought into the discourse about America is a reworking of the Adamic myth of innocence and life in a paradise, though one in which the desire to "fondle" women is not a sign of human fall, but part and parcel of the newness of the future offered by the new world. The experience of post-lapsarian shame is quite cunningly eliminated from that world through positing naked Adam as a kind of clothing, as a carrier of an innocent culture which, in the American context, will become the sign of progress and achievement. This innocent covering of the feminine, the covering whose production does not need any activity on her part, constitutes a proto-culture in which labor, another post-lapsarian effect, figures as "manning" in the economic sense—providing a crew of people to perform some kind of work.

It was in this vein that the now classical figure of R. W. B. Lewis's American Adam reappeared in the nineteenth century as an ideal of national persona—an "image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas… that of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities poised at the start of a new history" (i). Interestingly, Lewis calls this proto-culture the beginning of "a native American mythology" (i)—the word "native" marking Adam as newly born in America, as a native who is not quite identifiable with Indians. The new world needs a new kind of paradise in which innocence is a heroic kind of work. Work thus, importantly, ceases to be God's punishment for transgression, but

a potentiality not so much of regaining paradise, but of making it anew, away from the east, away from England and Europe. From the American perspective, the Old World becomes an unwelcome space, perhaps the space east of Eden to which Cain was exiled (Genesis 4:16).

Donne's imaginary transoceanic excursion to America seems to be a trait of the exhaustion of England, and perhaps also of Europe, as a place of authentic and innocent "manning." The potential of authentic possession, of manning by one man, is in Donne transported to America, to the west, which figures as a land of newness no longer accessible on the old continent. The old world demands a resurrection, a new nativity which the discovery of the new world has begun to promise. America stands for the promise of the change of the world and constitutes the frontier of that world, the promise of transition in which America itself, or perhaps herself, is also so to speak transitory. Adam should live in Paradise, not in America, and the new history Lewis envisions may well be read as the history of the world rather than that of America.

America is difficult to embrace as a being in itself, as an autonomous sovereign entity or state, as it is in fact more or less the whole of the Western world that has contributed to its making. Writing that "America was… the achievement by which Europe most truly revealed her own nature" (387), Fernand Braudel seems to be claiming that America is an expression of a nature that could not be fully expressed in Europe, an expression of a desire to break free from the old, which also speaks beneath the rhetoric of possession in Donne's poem. Geographically, this desire for the new beginning seems to be paradoxical, as the location of America west of Europe is rhetorically loaded with an end, with the end of the day, with decline, or with death. It is in the east that things begin, but they inevitably move westward, though not necessarily toward an end. It is again John Donne who in "Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness" brings in the theme, claiming that topographically, east and west are one and that their meeting place is the promise of resurrection: "What shall my east hurt me? As west and east / In all flat maps—and I am one—are one. / So death doth touch the resurrection" (l. 13-15). It is not exactly, as Ladan Niayesch writes, that the east is "a place diversely evoking resurrection and the siege of earthly Paradise" (47). The evocation is instigated through the encounter of the west which, rather than a place, is a direction, an unexplored space of the future whose earthly token may well be Donne's America, a paradise of unity situated somewhere away from the old world.

West as the direction of a new beginning was a theme dear to Henry David Thoreau, to whom Donne's poetry was quite well known: he ascribed to the poet "an occasional fine distinction and poetic utterance of a high order" (qtd. in Smith 191). The west of which Thoreau spoke, however, did not figure as Donne's "empery." It "was but another name for the Wild," and it was there, in the wildness of this west, that he was famously seeking the preservation of the world, finding the east to be an unwelcome burden of the past: "Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free" (Thoreau 34). Going, or walking, west is a liberating movement which he

also calls "progress." He ascribes it not only to Americans, but generally to mankind, though without attributing to that movement any particular task or end: "I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west" (34). Though from John Donne's seventeenth-century perspective there was only one America, Thoreau's America seems to be split into two wests, a division both temporal and spatial. His Oregon lies not only west of Concord, but also in the future, while both Oregon and Concord lie, importantly, west of Europe, which, like the biblical land of Nod, is located not only east of the Eden of the new world, but also in the past:

> We go eastward to realize history, and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure. The Atlantic is a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the old world and its institutions. If we do not succeed this time, there is perhaps one more chance for the race left before it arrives on the banks of the Styx; and that is in the Lethe of the Pacific, which is three times as wide. (34)

Though the old world has not been quite forgotten and reminds about itself on the American east coast, there is still a hope to cross another water of forgetfulness, another Lethe, which is located this time west of America. To move west in fact means to follow the Sun, the universally natural way of the world, and Thoreau quite explicitly calls the Sun "the Great Western Pioneer" who "appears to migrate westward daily and tempt us to follow him" (35). Not everybody, however, yields to the temptation, and some decide to live a sedentary life of settlers—a life that is, as most readers of Thoreau well know, the life of quiet desperation—and remain, at least mentally, in the east. Thoreau's westward movement is a reflection of a global kind of desire to know more than oneself, which he evokes in *Walden* through a slightly distorted reference to the Enlightenment call of Alexander Pope. Pope's "Know then Thyself" from *An Essay on Man* changes in *Walden* into "explore Thyself," the exploration being much more demanding than simple observation as it transgresses all borders and divisions:

> obey the precept of the old philosopher, and Explore thyself. Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve.… Start now on that farthest western way, which does not pause at the Mississippi or the Pacific, nor conduct toward a worn-out China or Japan, but leads on direct, a *tangent* to this sphere, summer and winter, day and night, sun down, moon down, and at last earth down too. (287, italics added)

Thoreau's progress goes west tangentially, and the exploration thus performed only touches the land, perhaps, as in Donne, caresses it with roving hands, though, in Thoreau, without appropriating the land. The progress is contiguous to the surface of the America located west of the Mississippi, and to the world west of the Pacific,

which has been traditionally classified as eastern. What prompts this exploration is "the westward tendency" (Thoreau 609) which Thoreau ascribes in *Walking* also to Columbus, who going west was also going east, though not necessarily to America:

> I walk out into a nature such as the old prophets and poets Menu, Moses, Homer, Chaucer, walked in. You may name it America, but it is not America. Neither Americus Vespucius, nor Columbus, nor the rest were the discoverers of it. There is a truer account of it in Mythology than in any history of America so called that I have seen. (604)

America, or whatever you name it, figures here as something that nowadays may well be called a transnational project, a project in which one may observe America neither from within nor from above, but as it were tangentially. Thoreau, praising the tangential movement with nature, did study America, though from a slightly estranged perspective, and saw in it both continuations of Europe and ways of evading those continuations, though not in the building of an exceptional nation demanding obedience from its citizens-members. A tangential perspective allows for a certain non-belonging, a view from the vantage point of a neighbor rather than that of a member, a perspective that allows one to individually wander, or saunter, without territorializing the space in which one is moving. We all neighbor with America, and perhaps it is the idea of neighboring which might enable us to evade being "enmeshed in a battle over the idea of America" (299), as Alice Kessler-Harris phrases it, to evade the search for the essences of America and its identities, and look for Americas in what seems to be our own milieus. Such a transnational perspective is also, inevitably, a multicultural one. As such, Kessler-Harris writes, "despite its refusal to acknowledge a stable meaning or precise unchanging definition of America," it "nevertheless opens the possibility of conceiving democratic culture as a process in whose transformation we are all invited to participate" (313).

Though Thoreau scarcely used the word "democracy" in his writings, in *Civil Disobedience* it appears alongside the idea of respect for individual neighboring with an imaginary state which as yet has not been discovered, even in the already existing America:

> Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and

> suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a
> still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not
> yet anywhere seen. (659)

Perhaps America did prepare the way for a more perfect state, yet its westward movement is not complete despite its frontier having moved away from the east and having crossed the Mississippi. The west does awaken the truly democratic spirit; it bears its fruit, but simultaneously drops it off in making it an object of the settler economy governed by demands of sedentary life. West of the Mississippi is a promised land in Thoreau, though not because of the possibility of settling, but rather because of the potential of awakening wildness, even in domestic creatures which somehow miraculously turn into buffalos:

> I love even to see the domestic animals reassert their native rights, any
> evidence that they have not wholly lost their original wild habits and
> vigor; as when my neighbor's cow breaks out of her pasture early in the
> spring and boldly swims the river, a cold, gray tide, twenty-five or thirty
> rods wide, swollen by the melted snow. It is the buffalo crossing the
> Mississippi. (621)

The state as it was in Thoreau's time did not quite tolerate buffalos, bringing them to near extinction at the end of the nineteenth century.

Having crossed the Mississippi, the state at that time paused at the Pacific and officially announced in 1890 the closing of the American frontier. The argument of the superintendent of the U.S. Census for that year read that "[u]p to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so *broken into* by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line" (qtd. in Turner, 199). Frederic Jackson Turner's seminal essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which was prompted by the event, was presented in 1893 at a special meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago that also celebrated four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America. Interestingly, for Turner the closing of the frontier did not mean the end of the making of America, as with the "going" of the frontier "has closed the first period of American history" (227). This idea closes the essay, and potential future historical developments are not predicted in it.

In the text of the essay, the movement of the frontier is presented as a smooth process of America's distancing herself from Europe. This process is in fact as natural and unstoppable as the movement of a glacier, a blind kind of movement insensitive to the question of the near extermination of Indians which it involved:

> Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. As
> successive terminal moraines result from successive glaciations, so each
> frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the

region still partakes of the frontier characteristics. Thus the advance of the
frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe,
a steady growth of independence on American lines. (201)

The frontier, as it seems, cannot be fully closed, and its traces still remain in the
settled areas even in 1893, to which also the switch from the use of the past tense
to present perfect testifies. Turner's America needs the frontier, and John Kennedy's
1960 project of New Frontier seems to be a continuation of this vision. The frontier
may become officially closed down, but adjacent to it, or perhaps tangential, is
Thoreau's "westward tendency" for which the west need not be literally in the west,
but elsewhere, anyway away from the frontier. And it is again Turner who in 1896,
three years after he published his essay, presented the frontier in a school dedication
in Portage as a paradise-like space of constant rejuvenation in which wildness
functioned as a constitutive outside of sorts, an outside whose tangential presence he
compared to a generous bank of nature which credits the endeavors of democracy:

> Americans had a safety valve for social danger, a bank account on which
> they might continually draw to meet losses. This was the vast unoccupied
> domain that stretched from the borders of the settled area to the Pacific
> Ocean.... No grave social problem could exist while the wilderness at
> the edge of civilizations [*sic*] opened wide its portals to all who were
> oppressed, to all who with strong arms and stout heart desired to hew out
> a home and a career for themselves. Here was an opportunity for social
> development continually to begin over again, wherever society gave signs
> of breaking into classes. Here was a magic fountain of youth in which
> America continually bathed and was rejuvenated. (qtd. in Cullen 142)

What strikes Jim Cullen, from whose book I am quoting this passage, is "the elegiac
tone of Turner's speech: he spoke in the past tense" (143). Perhaps bringing this
note of sadness in, Turner expresses a nostalgically rooted hope for reaching more
distant spheres of wilderness, more distant edges of civilization so as to make the
rejuvenating bathing available again. Yet Turner's insistence on America's turning her
back upon both Europe and the Atlantic Ocean, representative of what Henry Nash
Smith more generally called the agrarian tradition, "made it difficult for Americans
to think of themselves as members of a world community" (260). This tradition also
treated the oceans as protective moats that shielded the growth of America from
foreign frosts and blights (cf. Okihiro, 75). Gary Okihiro rightly notes in his paper
on the Pacific linkages with America that the maritime tradition was an equally
Eurocentric variant of Turner's agrarianism as it "simply stressed the American side
of Atlantic civilization, and the connection charted by Columbus between America
and Europe remained the central feature of a more global view of U.S. history" (76).
However, as we have seen, Thoreau brought in the Pacific as an extended version of
the Mississippi, and he praised Columbus not so much for the discovery as for his

already mentioned "westward tendency," in which the discovery was but an incident on the way to Asia.

Though you may name it America, it was more than the America that Columbus discovered. Thoreau's westward movement to Japan and China somehow ascribes to him a vision, or rather an intuition, of a spiritually unified world in which, or to which, America was but a passage. It does not really matter for Thoreau whether the discovered space is in America or in Africa, and the little that is provided to him in the woods is but a provision for a journey he encourages us to embark upon, again evoking the name of Columbus: "Were preserved meats invented to preserve meat merely? Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought. Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice" (286). The named earthly empires are posited here again as tangential to the individual empire of exploration, and the explorer does not really care about naming places. Even the cardinal directions of the world are not relevant for the experts "in home-cosmography" practiced by one who chooses to be a Columbus, and Thoreau at one point seems to be conflating Africa and the west: "What does Africa, what does the West stand for?" (286). Though the impulse to open the channels of thought comes to Thoreau from the American west, their strength of transportation leads them away from any particular locations.

The idea of America as a passage was later in the nineteenth century taken up by Walt Whitman, who, fascinated with the improvements of transportation technology, saw in American railways one of the means to carry his mind to a realm which may be named India, and which was not India. His poem "Passage to India" (1871) radically breaks all borders and frontiers in search of a brotherhood of men and souls for whom America is but a rondure on which the Pacific Railroad has been built "Tying the Eastern to the Western sea / The road between Europe and Asia" (l. 64-65) and thus enabling approach to the East from the east. Equally important as the construction of the Pacific Railroad was for Whitman the building of the Suez Canal, which made India more easily approachable from the west. Whitman's project in this sometimes rhetorically convoluted poem is a kind of expertise home-cosmography and topography in which nothing seems to be where it is and what it is:

> Passage to more than India!
> O secret of the earth and sky!
> Of you O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers!
> Of you O woods and fields! of you strong mountains of my land!
> Of you O prairies! of you gray rocks! O morning red! O clouds! O rain and snows!
> O day and night, passage to you! (l. 233-38)

There is some America in Whitman's "more than India"—strong mountains, woods and fields, prairies—but the continent, Ratan Bhattacharjee notes, "is celebrated as a force of modernization. Whitman sees both [India and America] as caught up in an

inexorable thrust toward globalization, where all countries are swept up in the same push toward progress" (1493). The interconnection of the world is technologically strengthened not only by the transcontinental railway, but also by the transatlantic undersea cable, which is a part of the link between East and West and between Past and Present: "The seas inlaid with eloquent gentle wires; / Yet first to sound, and ever sound, the cry with thee O soul, / The Past! the Past! the Past!" (l. 5-9). This global connectedness of the world enables the neighboring of times and places in which no place is more central than others, in which no place, or state, is exceptional. India is more than India because it reaches beyond itself, and so is America.

However outlandish Whitman's poem may seem, it does express a craving for what I have tentatively addressed here as "going west"—a continuation of Columbus's, however failed, passage to India—though no longer in the name of some monarch, state, or nation, but in the name of a connectedness of people which America, quite a long time ago now, incited—not only in John Donne.

If America is more than America, then the question of its identity becomes slightly problematic, especially as an object of study. The question of what we study when studying America, in the light of America's interconnectedness with more or less all bright and dark places of the world, also largely depends on where we study, as this "where" may well be the more of America. Writing not so long ago, in 1916, about a trans-national America, Randolph Bourne claimed that "we shall have to give up the search for our native 'American' culture" (91). Having put the word "American" in inverted commas, he still retained the possessive "our," thus as it were delegating the search to those who are American natives, though not necessarily Indians. What slightly deconstructs this exclusive "we," however, is Bourne's simultaneous claim that "there is no distinctively American culture" (91).

This last statement, which clearly questions the idea of American exceptionalism, prompts Winfried Fluck to try to prove that Bourne's idea also carries with it traces of exceptionalism: "Bourne's reinterpretation of American culture as a transnational culture thus remains a theory about the difference American culture makes" (60). This makes the American difference into a kind of exceptionalism, especially in the light of Bourne's use of such statements as "Only America… can lead in this cosmopolitan enterprise" (Bourne 96, qtd. in Fluck 60). The next sentence in Bourne's text, however, makes the argument a little more complex, and writing about Americans, though limiting them by some kind of belonging, opens up a space which clearly may be called more than American:

> Only the American—and in this category I include the migratory alien who has lived with us and caught the pioneer spirit and a sense of new social vistas—has the chance to become that citizen of the world. America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. (96)

The pioneer spirit, as we have seen, also moved Columbus westward, and the idea of weaving with other lands was also an impulse of Whitman's passage to more than India. Bourne's "migratory alien" is not an exceptional being; he or she may arrive from any place in the world, and they need not be detached from their pasts which constitute yet another sphere of Whitman's passaging. The westward movement I am discussing here carries within it both the past and the future, and if by exceptionalism may be meant an attempt "to detach the United States' history from comparable pasts" (Kramer 1357), this detachment can only be postulated as an ideological project of unity, a project which, in the case of defining an object of study, may seem quite useful, though it necessarily closes the frontier of exploration to what, in this case America, is.

Fluck's critique of Bourne's transnational America from 1916 is, more generally, a critique of transnational American studies for its fear of being accused of exceptionalism: "One of the reasons why American Studies scholars are currently hesitant to acknowledge that, although American culture may not have developed autonomously, it has nevertheless developed under conditions of its own, is that they are afraid of being accused of exceptionalism" (60). Though he claims that "the development of a transnational perspective is a welcome new research agenda in American Studies" (61), what this perspective somehow misses in his view is a clearly defined and delimited object of study, "a system of underlying premises about one's object of study and the best way to analyze it" without which we might be talking about something more than there is, for example. Without such a system, we would not only be unable to make meaningful claims about an object of interpretation, but "[in] fact, we would not have any object" (62). We thus, as it seems, would not have America, at least as it, or she, is. And we, be it inclusive or exclusive, do not have her.

<div align="center">✳✳✳</div>

In Editor's Note to one of the issues of *The Journal of Transnational American Studies*, Shelley Fisher Fishkin thus wrote about "our field":

> The more we learn, it seems, the less we know. Definitions of our field that may have appeared to be clear a few years ago may now appear to be more blurred or porous than we thought. What is our object of study? What methods do we use to study it? As we endlessly debate these basic questions, we sometimes feel we may be further away from, rather than closer to, answering the question, *What is transnational American Studies?* (4)

Being "further away," as it seems, need not be a negative judgment, and the feeling of loss is somehow inscribed within the predicament of any kind of American studies, if only for the reason that it all started with Columbus's going to the East by way of going "further away" from it. His actions, Stephen Greenblatt notes, were "performed

entirely *for a world elsewhere*" (56). What they have performed there, and how, seem to be questions of relevance for transnational American Studies, regardless of where the *elsewhere* may be.

Works Cited

Bhattacharjee, Ratan. "E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Walt Whitman's 'A Passage to India': India Connections." *European Academic Research* 1.7 (2013): 1472-1484. Print.

Bourne, Randolph. "Trans-National America." *The Atlantic Monthly* 24 (1916): 86-97. Print.

Braudel, Fernand. *The Perspective of the World*. London: William Collins and Son, 1985. Print.

Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Print.

Donne, John. *The Poems of John Donne*. Ed. E.K. Chambers. London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1896. Bartleby.com, 2012. Web. 24 June 2017. www.bartleby.com/357/.

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Envisioning Transnational American Studies." *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6.1 (2015): 1-12. Web. 14 Aug 2017. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1pd1074m.

Fluck, Winfried. "Theories of American Culture (and the Transnational Turn in American Studies)." *Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 23 (2007): 59-77. Print.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.

Kessler-Harris, Alice. "Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate." *American Quarterly* 44 (1992): 299-313. Print.

Kramer, Paul A. "Power and Connection." *American Historical Review* 116.5 (2011): 1348-1391. Print.

Lewis, R.W.B. *The American Adam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955. Print.

Niayesch, Ladan. "'All flat maps, and I am one': Cartographic References in the Poems of John Donne." *Etudes Epistèmè* 10 (2006): 43-52. Print.

Okihiro, Gary Y. "Toward a Pacific Civilization." *The Japanese Journal of American Studies* 18 (2007): 73-85. Print.

Smith, A.J. *John Donne: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge: London and New York, 2010. Print.

Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950. Print.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau*. New York: Random House, 1937. Print.

Turner, Frederic J. (1894) "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."
    Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893.
    Washington DC, 1894. 199-227. Web. 26 Aug 2017.

Whitman, Walt. "Passage to India." *Leaves of Grass, 16 Comprehensive Reader's
    Edition.* New York: New York University Press, 1965. 411-421. Print.

Piotr Skurowski

Looking Back, 2018-1916: The Cosmopolitan Idea in Randolph Bourne's "Transnational America"

Abstract: This article re-examines the classic 1916 text by Randolph Bourne, considered a forerunner of today's multiculturalism, to demonstrate how Bourne's cosmopolitanism (defined as transnationalism) related to the ideological and intellectual currents of the Progressive Era, and how it registers with today's readers' different sensibilities (vis-à-vis issues like race, ethnicity and democracy) as well as some of the new theoretical perspectives on cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. While the article argues for an unceasing relevancy of Bourne's text, it also identifies the problems today's readers may have with it, most importantly with the author's Eurocentrism as well as the exceptionalist underpinnings of his argument.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, transnationalism, Progressivism, American exceptionalism, Eurocentrism

Randolph Silliman Bourne—a Progressive Era intellectual who died at the young age of 32 in the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 (along with some 675 thousand other Americans)—was doubtless one of the most interesting and original young minds of early twentieth-century America. Bourne was many things at the same time: a brilliant writer; an iconoclast fighting the conservatism of America's Anglo-Saxon cultural elite (Genteel Tradition in American philosophy and letters, Anglophilia, the anti-intellectualism of American collegiate culture); a rebel rejecting the suffocating conventions and prejudices, embracing socialism and cultural radicalism, supporting syndicalism, feminism, attacking wealth and privilege; a pacifist in the time of war. On a human level, a truly heroic—and tragic—figure, whose personal life was marred by the deformities suffered at birth and from a tuberculosis of the spine. Bourne's untimely departure hurt the cause of the cultural and political left in the United States at a truly crucial historical moment (the triumph of Wilsonianism and the growingly conservative climate of the 1920s). In an emphatic statement by the historian of the American Left Edward Abrahams, the death of Randolph Bourne marked the end of an era: "For his contemporaries as well as for many intellectuals since 1918, Bourne's life represented an unfinished search for a new culture that would have enlarged personal freedom at the same time it supported collective social ideals. Few of Bourne's admirers did not interpret

his passing as signifying the end of their own hopes for a cultural revolution in the United States" (Molloy 31).

This article will focus on a single essay published almost exactly 100 years ago, in July 1916 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine, titled "Transnational America." The essay is, arguably, the most often anthologized and quoted piece of Bourne's writing and has a prominent place in David Hollinger's two-volume sourcebook *The American Intellectual Tradition*, a standard college reader used in courses on American intellectual history. Significantly, Hollinger called Bourne's essay "the most significant piece of writing by multiculturalism's most illustrious precursor and prophet" (93), while another commentator, Chris Lehmann, on a more recent occasion ("Randolph Bourne's America" panel, 2004) referred to "Transnational America" as "a foundation text for the multicultural ideal." As observed by Andrew Walzer, contemporary historians often refer to Randolph Bourne's cosmopolitanism, as outlined in "Transnational America," in their search for the early expositions of "civic" (trans)nationalism, as opposed to the cultural nationalism" (Walzer 18).

In the essay, Bourne proclaimed the failure of the melting pot and proposed to take a second look at Americanization. Instead of trying to enforce a speedy assimilation to mold the immigrant to become an Anglo-Saxon, Bourne urged that the non-Anglo-Saxon "races" he specifically mentioned—Germans, Scandinavians, Slavs (Bohemians, Poles), Jews and the rest of recent immigrants of European origins—ought to be allowed to keep their separate cultures and not be expected to give up their separate legacies. Because of the cultural dominance of the of the Anglo-Saxons (accused by Bourne of hopeless conservatism and provincialism), America was threatened with stagnation and needed a reinvigorating change. America, claimed Bourne, badly needed this "cross-fertilization," while the expected—and hoped for—assimilation could only result in a "tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity" (90). Bourne did not hesitate to offer a low estimate of the claims of cultural patriots: "there is no distinctively American culture," he wrote, calling instead for the recognition of America as a multicultural nation *par excellence*: "It is apparently our lot… to be a federation of cultures" (91).

Bourne's vision of the U.S. society as a federation of cultures is an early expression of the beliefs apparently shared by the majority of Americans today (to quote Nathan Glazer's book title from 1997: "We are all multiculturalists now"). Yet it took some courage, back in 1916, to write in this vein—at the time when the U.S. was in the midst of an Americanization campaign and the country was bracing for a plunge into the darkness of World War I. Less than two years before, Bourne had returned from a year-long stay in Europe as an enthusiastic Europhile for whom it was Continental Europe, rather than his native country, that deserved being called the land of the future. Now, those hopes were dashed by the onslaught of the war, the year 1914 marking the end of an era of a quickly globalizing world. The war was certainly a debacle of the European civilization Bourne had been paying homage

to in his early writings, notably in "Maurice Barres and the Youth of France" and "Impressions of Europe 1913-14" (the latter being a report for Columbia University from a trip enabled by a fellowship to study town planning in Europe).

In the U.S., the war-time patriotic agitation was grounded in the rising anti-European, anti-foreign, and increasingly xenophobic mood symbolized by the rebirth of the Klan and, on the cultural front, by the resonance of books like Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and of the Hollywood blockbuster *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). The country's Anglo-Saxon, openly Anglophile elites stood in fear of possible subversion from the still unassimilated groups of foreign ancestry recently arrived from Europe as part of an unprecedented massive "invasion" of immigrant "hordes" from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. The result of those fears was the government-backed attempt at speeding up assimilation of the freshly arrived "hyphenated Americans." Celebrating the immigrants' cultural difference, insisting on their right to keep their own foreign ways and notions, was obviously inconsistent with the widely circulating patriotic ideals and became almost untenable at the moment the U.S. was drawn into the war. It was at this point that Randolph Bourne parted ways with the group of pro-Wilsonian intellectuals he associated with before the war: John Dewey, Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, George Creel, and others. Instead, Bourne joined ranks with a small and viciously attacked group of pacifists and anti-war objectors, including, among others, Jane Addams.

Thus Bourne's cosmopolitan vision of an American federation of cultures needs to be studied in the political and ideological context of the time, when the prevailing political winds were blowing in the opposite direction. While proclaimed in a politically tense moment, this vision was not, to be sure, entirely unprecedented. And, ironically, it shared some recognizable components with the ideology formulated and espoused by Woodrow Wilson and his followers. One obvious influence (recognized by Bourne in a later text) was the voice of Horace Kallen, whose most influential text, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot" was published in February 1915 in *The Nation* magazine. In it, Kallen famously rejected the assimilationist ideology of the Melting Pot, embracing the idea of cultural pluralism, very much in the way Bourne did it a year and a half later (precise timing seems of importance here, as every successive month led to the spread of nationalist and patriotic feelings, supportive of speedy assimilation of the immigrant). Unlike Randolph Bourne, a native born of Anglo-Saxon parentage, Kallen was a Jewish immigrant from Silesia (he came to the U.S. as a 5-year-old child). And even though he himself seemed to be a perfect example of successful assimilation (the first Jewish-American teacher at Princeton, a Harvard Ph.D., and one of the founders of the New School in New York City), Kallen embraced a vision of American society as a primarily economic and civic polity, cemented by its use of English as a lingua franca, but at the same time a society consisting of culturally autonomous segments, grounded in diverse cultures brought over from Europe by the major immigrant groups—including, of course, the Anglo-Saxons, with the latter regarded as but one of many.

Compared with Kallen's, Bourne's vision, as articulated in "Transnational America," underemphasized the autonomy of each group of different national origin, instead insisting on their interaction and mixing—though not in the Melting Pot fashion, in which the immigrant was meant to be "Americanized." Thus Bourne's essay demonstrates a visible tension between a cultural pluralist and a cosmopolitan perspective, in the sense of promoting a transnational anchoring of identities in more than a single national tradition. Bourne insisted on making a dual citizenship possible for the immigrant, both in the legal and in the "spiritual" sense, and welcomed the back-and-forth mobility between the U.S. and the immigrant's mother country (seeing the return migration as a major instrument of America's influence abroad).

Looking back at Bourne's cultural manifesto from the vantage point of one hundred years later, one may conclude that in some important ways he sounds very modern, very up-to-date, one might even state, if one thinks, for example, of the "transnational turn" proclaimed recently in the social sciences and humanities, including American studies itself, and of the reawakened interest in the cosmopolitan idea. Alas, such a "looking backward"—a phrase bringing to mind the title of Bellamy's utopian novel—does not allow a look on the "backward" times from the vantage point of social utopia achieved, as was the case with the novel, given today's spread of xenophobia worldwide, and an obvious lack of progress in terms of securing the human rights. The transnational idea—formulated by Bourne contrary to the drift of the contemporary events (it came at a moment when the nineteenth-century world system was quickly falling apart)—seems to raise similar hopes, and run against the same obstacles, as it did at the beginning of the twentieth century. The quick spread of globalization in the wake of the collapse of the Cold War world order, as well as its angry contestation from both the political right and left, seem to be the major reasons behind the revival of the transnational and the cosmopolitan idea, leading to a new "paradigm shift" in the cultural and social sciences.[1] Talking from the perspective of American studies, Donald Pease—having given credit to Randolph Bourne for coining the term "transnational America," goes on to assert the significance of the historical moment: "But the term [transnationalism] did not achieve popularity within American studies until the cessation of the Cold War in

---

1   Today's globalization—and the hopes it engenders (including the hope to build a cosmopolitan society), roughly parallel the world situation preceding the outbreak of WWI. As stated by Eric Hobsbawm, "the major fact about the nineteenth century is the creation of a single global economy, progressively reaching into the most remote corners of the world, an increasingly dense web of economic transactions, communications and movements of goods, money and people linking the developed countries with each other and with the undeveloped world.… This globalization… continued to grow… massively in terms of volume and numbers—between 1875 and 1914" (62). Apart from the movement of goods and people, the pre-WWI world system involved a wide exchange of ideas, including the social-democratic solutions espoused by the Progressive reformers and their equivalent in other countries, including Australia and New Zealand. See, for example, Peter J. Coleman, *Progressivism and the World of Reform* (1987).

Europe led us American studies scholars to consider a transnational framework to be a salutary alternative to American exceptionalism" (Pease 39). Bourne's passionate embrace of cosmopolitanism and internationalism in the midst of the war waged one hundred years ago seem almost prophetic, given the increasingly palpable effects of globalization in our time. Consider the recent words of Ulrich Beck:

> cosmopolitanism has ceased to be merely a controversial rational idea; in however distorted a form, it has left the realm of philosophical castles in the air and has entered reality. Indeed, it has become the defining feature of a new era of reflexive modernity, in which national borders and differences are dissolving and must be renegotiated.… This is why a world that has become cosmopolitan urgently demands a new standpoint, the cosmopolitan outlook, from which we can grasp the social and political realities in which we live. (3)

Having given to Bourne his due as a forerunner of today's "transnationalism," we should also reflect on how his ideas fit into today's debate on the meaning of this keyword. First of all, as Donald Pease observes, the semiotics of the term is open to negotiation: "Shifts in the meaning of the term 'transnational' depend on the disparate purposes for which it gets used… the transnational is a highly contradictory concept, invested with multiple and incompatible significations. Since its significance gets particularized differently each time the transnational appears in a particular context, it is necessary to distinguish and clarify these different uses and meanings" (Pease 40). Likewise, the meaning of the term "cosmopolitan" (used—and understood— by Bourne as synonymous with "transnational"), in the view of Victor Roudometof, lacks a "universally shared definition," and may range, for example, from a "thin" cosmopolitanism (referring to a separation from the local), through "rooted," or "vernacular" cosmopolitanism (valorizing and cherishing the local), to "glocalized" cosmopolitanism, where "global detachment and local attachment coexist in a symbiotic relationship" (Roudometof 149).

Bourne's cosmopolitan vision was certainly not a "thin" one, but rather close to "rooted"[2] or what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls a "partial cosmopolitanism," one

---

2   The term was apparently coined by Mitchell Cohen in 1991: "What is needed is the fashioning of a dialectical concept of *rooted* cosmopolitanism, which accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches and that rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties, of standing in many circles, but with common ground" (qtd. in Werbner 9). The concept seems an attempt to exonerate cosmopolitanism from the stereotypical condemnation of it as "the unrealistic utopia of a rootless cosmopolitanism where everyone is supposedly a 'world citizen', in a borderless world" (Ang 229). Consider also the comment by Pnina Werbner, arguing against the repeatedly verbalized prejudice characterizing all cosmopolitans as "rootless": "Against the slur that cosmopolitans are rootless, with no commitments to place or nation, the new post-1990s cosmopolitanism attempts to theorise the complex ways in which cosmopolitans juggle particular and transcendent loyalties—morally, and inevitably also, politically" (Werbner 2).

that does not "disdain the partialities of kinfolk and community" (Appiah loc. 162, 180). In a larger sense, his was the voice of a generation of Progressive reformers inspired by the worldwide trend toward social democracy which considered the latter as the way of fulfilling the "Promise of American Life," to quote the title of Herbert Croly's manifesto of Progressivism. The historian Jonathan M. Hansen listed Bourne together with William James, John Dewey, Jane Addams, Eugene V. Debs, W. E. B. Du Bois, Louis Brandeis, and Horace Kallen, who

> repudiated liberalism's association with acquisitive individualism and laissez-faire economics, delineating a model of liberal citizenship whose virtues and commitments amount to what I have labeled 'cosmopolitan patriotism'…. While celebrating individual autonomy and cultural diversity, the cosmopolitan patriots exhorted Americans to embrace a social-democratic ethic that reflected the interconnected and mutually dependent nature of life in the modern world. (Hansen xiv)

Indeed, Hansen's definition of "cosmopolitan patriotism," an oxymoron at a first glance, may probably be applied to most American intellectuals, in the past as well as in our time, attempting to combine their left-wing, or more specifically social-democratic ideas, with patriotism (think, for example, of Richard Rorty's "leftist patriotism" postulated in *Achieving Our Country*), or at least with the need to seek accommodation with the cultural and political context of their life and work. Likewise, Bourne felt the need to distance himself from the "rootless" cosmopolitanism by subscribing to the idea of America as the world's first truly cosmopolitan nation: "America is already the world federation in miniature, the continent where for the first time in history has been achieved that miracle of hope, the peaceful living side by side, with character substantially preserved, of the most heterogeneous peoples under the sun" (93). "The miracle of hope… achieved" was clearly a trope positioning Bourne's essay in the hallowed tradition of American millennialism, and turning it into a patriotic narrative symptomatic of his rootedness in America's mainstream tradition.

Yet, despite its visionary quality, Bourne's writing contains some disquietingly darker tones, striking a discordant note with today's sensitivities. There are passages, for example, where Bourne obviously speaks in the voice of his class, or even more significantly, moments when he chooses not to speak at all, evidently following the "custom of the country," or at least of "white" America. Today's reader may be struck, for example, by occasional outbursts of condescension in Bourne the intellectual— but also the avowed democrat—toward the emerging mass society and culture of his time, and the condition of marginality characterizing the life of the immigrant masses. The erosion of national cultures tends, he writes, "to create hordes of men and women without a spiritual country, cultural outlaws without taste, without standards but those of the mob" (90). Inhabitants of this cultural fringe, he argues, make for "detached fragments of peoples, the flotsam and jetsam of American life,

the downward undertow of our civilization with its leering cheapness and falseness of taste in spiritual outlook. The absence of mind and sincere feeling which we see our slovenly towns, our vapid moving pictures, our popular novels, and in the vacuous faces of the crowds on the city street" (90). Bourne bemoans the "tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity," "Americanization understood as leveling down of national differences and replacing them with vapid, tasteless, 'rudimentary' American culture of the cheap newspaper, the 'movies,' the popular song, the ubiquitous automobile" (90). This is clearly the voice of Bourne the elitist, yearning for a national high culture that could stand up to the European standards.

Then there is the striking omission crying out from the text: Bourne basically ignores the race issue. The dual citizenship he is talking about—and defines as "the rudimentary form of that international citizenship to which, if our words mean anything, we aspire" (93)—extends to all the European nationalities and ethnic groups listed in his essay: French, German, Polish, Jewish, Anglo-Saxon. Yet this dual citizenship visibly excludes the African-American, the Asian or the Mexican. One can only regret Bourne takes no cognizance of the work of his great contemporary, W.E.B. Du Bois. For today's reader, the notion of "striving" for a "dual spiritual citizenship" immediately brings to mind Du Bois's famous proclamations about the "double-consciousness" and the "double self" being the lot of the black intellectual who wants to move across the ever impenetrable color line:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (*Souls* 8)

Du Bois wrote those lines for his *Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 (which apparently Bourne read); and in *The Atlantic* magazine, in the essay "The African Roots of War," he called for a full incorporation of "black men" into a democratic world-order as the necessary precondition for achieving a lasting peace worldwide: "We shall not drive war from this world until we treat them [black men] as free and equal citizens in a world-democracy of all races and nations" (712). The text was published one year before Bourne's contribution in the same magazine, hence it is almost certain that Bourne read it. Yet, Du Bois's was the voice crying in the wilderness: white America, including the Progressive intellectuals, was not ready for that call, and while some, like Bourne, were ready for "a world democracy of nations," they were certainly—and painfully—unwilling to invite Du Bois's "black men" and, indeed, the black women to participate (with the political status of the white women still hanging in the balance at this point).

Compared with Du Bois's, Bourne's perspective is largely Eurocentric, even though, like many of his Progressive contemporaries, he believed that it was

in America, actually, that the European cultures can thrive far better than in their proper homelands:

> No intense nationalism of the European plan can be ours. But do we not begin to see a new and more adventurous ideal? Do we not see how the national colonies in America, deriving power from the deep cultural heart of Europe and yet living here in mutual toleration, freed from the age-long tangles of races, creeds, and dynasties, may work out a federated ideal? America is transplanted Europe, but a Europe that has not been disintegrated and scattered in the transplanting as in some Dispersion. (91)

Bourne's Eurocentrism diminishes him in the eyes of the contemporary reader, even though, it should be stated, the exclusion of the African-American from the visions of Beloved Community was hardly Bourne's peculiarity: he seemed to share with most of the white Progressive Era intellectuals the lack of empathy for the parallel strife of another race to achieve the "dual cultural citizenship" status he so passionately endorsed for the groups of European origin. In that regard, Bourne was no longer a rebel, but conformed to the notions of his contemporaries about the "incompatibility" of white and black within the body of American society.

Indeed, the racism and xenophobia of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century reformers remain a blemish on the legacy of American progressivism and its image today. Inevitably perhaps, the widespread xenophobic views and nativist outbursts of the era poisoned the minds of the founders of twentieth-century American liberalism and this fact can be regarded as the 'original sin' of twentieth-century reform thought and practice. Herbert Gans, in *We're All Multiculturalists Now*, observed that "the significance of this episode [the Progressive Era] in the history of American thinking about race and ethnicity is that the argument over assimilation and Americanization evoked by the mass immigration of the period 1880-1924, and by the pressures of World War I simply did not take blacks, let alone Mexican Americans or Asians, into account" (112).

Today the Progressive Era's backlash against the ethnic and racial other seems to be coming back with a vengeance. This is perhaps the reason for what seems like a revival of interest in Progressive era's politics, including the cultural politics of the time. The September 2016 issue of *Perspectives on Politics* (a journal published by the American Political Science Association) may serve as an example: it is largely devoted to the legacy of Woodrow Wilson, tainted by his racism and endorsement of racial segregation in the federal government, as well as his opposition to the enfranchisement of women. In the words of one of the featured authors, Desmond King, "however formulated, illiberal invective marinated progressivism," and the "overpowering racism and illiberalism" of the leading Progressives "reek like chloroform." King takes Wilson to task for his "oppressive presence" in the era when "[t]hose alleged progressive heroes of factory laws, non-partisan ballots, and state intervention hated

all those unlike themselves—dodgy immigrants, African Americans, Mexicans, and anyone else they bothered to think about who offended the ascriptive hierarchies and codes… by which they lived" (King 788-89). King's critical estimate of Wilson was largely shared by most contributors to the "Reflections Symposium" on Wilson's legacy, featured in the same issue.

Bourne's virtual exclusion of the non-European from the vision of Beloved Community (the phrase he owed to the Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce) was symptomatic of the larger currents of his time, his opposition to Wilsonianism notwithstanding. Had Bourne lived longer, he might have taken a clearer stand on the issue. Perhaps he would have distanced himself from the skepticism of Horace Kallen who looped around the racial issue in his essay "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," restricting himself to the statement that "there seems to be some difference of opinion as to whether negroes should constitute an element in [this] blend" (meaning the putative "American race", understood as "a blend of at least all the European stocks"; 194). Yet, Bourne's "significant silence" on the matter may be disappointing for today's reader, given his standing as a forerunner of today's multiculturalism. No wonder perhaps that in some estimates Bourne's status as the "founding father" of multiculturalism becomes shaky. In the reading by Andrew Walzer, for example, Bourne emerges not so much as a "true" multiculturalist but a cultural nationalist, envisioning the future American national identity formed on the basis of ethnic exclusion, as well as—in Walzer's interpretation, based on his reexamination of Bourne's earlier texts—on "the ideal of the nation as a deep fraternity of male citizens and site of male power" (Walzer 18).

To complete the critical re-reading of Bourne's famous essay, one should turn to the ideological underpinnings of his "transnational" idea which—despite his reputation as a cultural and political radical—bring him unexpectedly close to Wilsonian exceptionalism and belief in America's world-mission. Thus, along with the dismantling of the old exceptionalist framework based on the dominance of the Anglo-Saxon, a new exceptionalist narrative is being born:

> Only America, by reason of the unique liberty of opportunity and traditional isolation for which she seems to stand, can lead in this cosmopolitan enterprise. Only the American—and in this category I include the migratory alien who has lived with us and caught the pioneer 'spirit and a sense of new social vistas—has the chance to become that citizen of the world'…. America is coming to be, not a nationality but a transnationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors. (96)

Thus the ending of Bourne's essay points in a direction not unlike that taken by Woodrow Wilson in his "mediating nation" speech from April 1915, in which the American president argued that "[w]e are naturally the mediating nation of the world" (Cadle loc 209-210). In this and many other political speeches, Woodrow

Wilson encompassed a vision of America as a "world-nation," uniquely qualified to act as a world leader; in fact, the world-saving mission is very much at the heart of Wilson's message to his country as well as to the embattled Europe. And so Bourne's cosmopolitanism, initially built on the assumption that American national culture hardly exists in itself, or at least is derivative vis-à-vis its British "original copy"—so that in order to constitute itself it needs sustenance from the rich cultural traditions brought over from the continent of Europe—morphs into an argument using exceptionalist clichés.

In a recent essay, Winfried Fluck writes about the paradox of a "transnational perspective" which, on closer inspection, sometimes betrays a "hidden agenda." Fluck argues that, in recent Americanist scholarship

> the transnational project is not just innocently aiming at a cosmopolitan broadening of interpretive horizons. It also pursues the goal of reconceptualizing America—that is, the very thing from which it apparently wants to escape or distance itself. Consciously or not, there is always—inevitably and always already—an underlying assumption at work about the current state, not only of American studies, but also of 'America,' and this assumption will determine the direction in which a transnational approach is taken. (367)

Fluck distinguishes what he calls an "aesthetic" transnationalism, celebrating cross-fertilization, mobility, and diversity as if for their own sake, and he goes on to say that "by redirecting our attention to the fact that the 'United States... has always been a transnational crossroads of culture,' aesthetic transnationalism… rejuvenates an America that has lost its multicultural vigor because of a narrow-minded nationalism" (368). "America becomes a world leader again," warns Fluck, "but paradoxically enough, no longer as the America of American exceptionalism but as 'Transnational America'" (370). Seen from this perspective, Randolph Bourne's now-classic essay from one hundred years ago may serve as an early manifestation of the pitfalls of the transnational idea that can so imperceptibly, almost against itself, be co-opted and harnessed to serve the larger purposes of American exceptionalism and world-mission ideology, even though—ironically—Bourne's writing took on Wilson as the main foe.

All in all, Bourne's ideas still resonate with the contemporary reader. Neither the exceptionalist underpinnings of his argument nor his upsetting silences can undo his important contributions to American intellectual history and public debate. Apart from his claim—secured by "Trans-National America"—to be regarded as one of the "founding fathers" of today's cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, Bourne's legacy lives on in other forms, and other contexts, based on other texts. Most importantly perhaps, his anti-war views (of which his statement that "war is the health of the state" is certainly the best known sample) are invoked by the political and cultural left today because of the many parallels existing between Wilsonianism—opposed

by Bourne—and the ideological formulations that can be heard from the American politicians today, especially in the area of the U.S. world role and its hegemonic foreign policy.[3] Likewise, Bourne's protest against what he believed was the pro-Wilsonian intellectuals' cynical will to power (and their misplaced hope of using the war to promote the Progressive reform) may seem uncannily up-to-date in view of the liberal elites' similar moral dilemmas of today. For all these reasons, Bourne's "ghost" is still visibly present with us.

Works Cited

Ang, Ien. "Multiculturalism." *New Keywords: A New Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Ed. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meghan Morris. Malden, MA, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005. 228-229. Print.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (Issues of Our Time). N. York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. Kindle Edition.

Beck, Ulrich. *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2006. Print.

Bourne, Randolph S. *History of a Literary Radical and Other Essays*. New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1920. Print.

——. "The Jew and Trans-National America." *Menorah Journal* 2.5 (Dec. 1915): 277-284. Print.

——. "Trans-National America." *The Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916): 86-97. Print.

Cadle, Nathaniel. *The Mediating Nation: Late American Realism, Globalization, and the Progressive State.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Kindle Edition.

Du Bois, W.E.B. "The African Roots of War." *The Atlantic Monthly* 115 (May 1915): 707-714. Print.

——. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

Fluck, Winfried. "A New Beginning? Transnationalisms." *New Literary History* 42.3 (Summer 2011): 365-384. Print.

Gans, Herbert. *We're All Multiculturalists Now*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997. Print.

Hansen, Jonathan M. *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003. Print.

Hobsbawm, E. J. *The Age of Empire 1875-1914*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.

Hollinger, David A. *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. Kindle Edition.

Kallen, Horace M. "Democracy versus the Melting Pot. A Study of American Nationality (Part One)." *The Nation* 100.2585 (Feb. 18, 1915): 190-194. Print.

3   See, for example: Robert Bly, "War is the Health of the State," *Minneapolis Star Tribune, Feb 24, 1991*, repr. http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/bly/war.htm; Franklin Foner, "Once Again, America First," *New York Times Online*, Oct. 10, 2004; Chris Suellentrop, "Libertarians for Obama?," *New York Times Online*, Sept. 9, 2009.

King, Desmond. "Illiberalism Unbound: America's Progressive Legacy." *Perspectives on Politics* 14.3 (Sept. 2016): 788-792. Print.

Molloy, Maureen A. *On Creating a Usable Culture: Margaret Mead and the Emergence of American Cosmopolitanism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008.

Pease, Donald. "How Transnationalism Reconfigured the Field of American Studies: the Transnational/Diaspora Complex". Ed. Yuan Shu and Donald Pease. *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning toward the Transpacific*. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015. 39-63. Print.

Randolph Bourne's America. Panel discussion held at Columbia University, Oct. 11, 2004. http://www.dkv.columbia.edu/w0410/

"Reflections Symposium. The Controversy over Woodrow Wilson's Legacy: A Discussion." *Perspectives on Politics* 14.3 (Sept. 2016): 758-776. Print.

Rorty, Richard. *Achieving our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). Print.

Roudometof, Victor. "Cosmopolitanism." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2. Ed. William A. Darity. Detroit, New York, London: Macmillan Reference, 2008. 149. Print.

Walzer, Andrew. "The Cultural Criticism of Randolph Bourne: A Usable Past for Multicultural America?" *Canadian Review of American Studies* 27.2 (1997): 1-22. Print.

Werbner, Pnina. "Introduction: Towards a New Cosmopolitan Anthropology". *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitianism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives*. Ed. Pnina Werbner. Oxford, New York: Berg, 2008. 1-29. Print.

Grzegorz Welizarowicz

Feel Like a Gringo: Transnational Consciousness in Los Angeles Punk Rock Songs

Abstract: The essay analyzes four songs from the catalogue of the Los Angeles punk rock scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is argued that the songs, written in response to the reality of the life in Los Angeles and in the Mexican-American borderlands, are expressive of transnational consciousness. Interpreted in this way, the songs are revealed as embodying the processes of distancing and then readjusting of oneself in relation to the dominant narrative of the US Nation and hence embody the idea of cosmopolitanization. The first two songs are by Chicano artists and express transnational anxieties as they are experienced by the artists and their communities within the U.S. The other two songs were selected because they record tiny personal impressions by white artists who, once they cross the border into Mexico, are faced with a nexus of transnational processes, which confront their certainties and affect their consciousness. The analysis makes use of the theory of affects (Tomkins), the theory of cosmopolitanism (Beck), as well as a selection of historical analyses and personal accounts by the artists.

Keywords: Chicano, Los Angeles, punk rock, Minutemen, The Bags, Los Illegals, cosmopolitanization, gringo, borderlands

This paper focuses on transnational themes expressed in selected songs by Los Angeles' punk rock bands of the late 1970s and early 1980s. I understand transnationalism as primarily, after Steven Vertovec, a "type of consciousness" (5) marked by "multiple identifications" and "decentered attachments" (6), although other meanings of the term—"social morphology" (4) or the types of systems and structures which provoke, sustain, or are destructive of transnationality; "cultural reproduction" or the processes of "cultural interpenetration and blending" (7); capital flows; and "site[s] of political engagement" (10)—are also factored in. Drawing on artists' own statements, cultural analyses, and the theories of Silvan S. Tomkins and Ulrich Beck, I argue that these songs, each in its unique way, explore personal affects (anger, depression, shame-humiliation) and simultaneously express transnational and/or cosmopolitan sentiments, becoming utopian spaces of cosmopolitanization. I aim to argue that the punk rock artists studied here, not unlike ethnic diasporas, formed an informal yet exemplary community of the transnational moment and that they can be considered the pioneers of what Beck calls the "cosmopolitan outlook" (*Cosmopolitan* 2). I first discuss two songs by Chicano/a punk rock bands The Bags

and Los Illegals. If these two examples can be considered as expressive of migrant or diaspora transnationalism, the examples I discuss in the last part of the essay—two songs by Minutemen—reveal a rarely-discussed aspect of transnationalism as an affective force that can momentarily engulf and transform those whose national or axiological identity had hitherto been taken for granted. In the paper, I quote extensively from an interview I conducted with Mike Watt, bass player and founding member of Minutemen, in Kraków on 22 October 2016, during a European tour of Il Sogno del Marinaio, an experimental rock band Watt formed with two Italian musicians in 2008.

Rather than generalizing that punk rock is a cultural form reflective of transnationalism, I suggest that it was the specific environment of Southern California and the Mexico-U.S. borderlands that contributed to the rise of a radical transcultural sensibility to which punk rock offered an apt, marked-with-urgency conduit. Music and lyrics by select representatives of the first wave of the Los Angeles punk rock scene, or of Watt affectionately calls "the Movement" (Watt), creatively negotiated the tensions palpable in the region.

These tensions are the result of, on the one hand, the region's proximity to the national border, its large Spanish-speaking population, as well as, its enduring lure for immigrants from all over the world and, on the other, the state's cultural apparatus' generation of simulacra which sustain a myth of "So-Cal's" cultural and ethnic homogeneity. This myth can be traced back to what Carey McWilliams terms the "Fantasy heritage" (35) or Mike Davis calls "ersatz history" (30)—a vision of the region's past invented during the Booster Era (1885-1925) and historically responsible for the rise of such ideas as "Los Angeles as 'new Rome'" (27) or "Los Angeles as the utopia of Aryan supremacism" (30). As Davis argues, the myth has "not only sublimated contemporary class struggle, but also censored, and repressed from view, the actual plight of Alta California's descendants" (27) or, as McWilliams put it more precisely in 1949, it has "perniciously beclouded relations between Anglos and Hispanos in the borderlands," and put a "veil of fantasy" over "the reality of cultural fusion" (47). This has not only resulted in depriving "the Mexicans of their heritage" by excising them from the regional symbolic—an excrescence on the state's body—but has also helped to "keep them in their place," that is, as McWilliams observes, the fantasy has had "a functional, not an ornamental arrangement" (39). Simply put, the dominant version of the region's past has rendered the majority of non-white Californians, especially the Spanish-speaking Mechicanos indigenous to the Southwest, an invisible second-class minority, as well as provided ideological support for unequal distribution of economic and cultural opportunities, creation of segregated neighborhoods and racial discrimination.

The Los Angeles punk rock Movement—the audiences, bands, concert venues, and "punk-inhabited apartments" (Bag 233)—provided the young participants from all backgrounds with a platform to unceremoniously break with conventions (generic, racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, sexual, fashion, class, and residential), to

cooperate across what had formerly been thought of as unbreachable turfs or limits of identification and to assert a cacophonous independence from the hitherto status quo, including the normativity of the Nation.

But First, What Is Punk Rock?

Very broadly, punk rock is a transnational phenomenon which arose in the mid-1970s on both sides of the Atlantic in response to social and cultural transformations affecting the West. One of the most important factors which triggered this aesthetic and cultural revolution in strictly musical terms was a reaction to what Watt terms the epoch of rock concerts being turned into "Nurnberg rallies" (Watt). Watt's metaphor ingeniously describes not only the 1970s mainstream rock music's ability to produce a rapport of the masses but also, perhaps inadvertently, its propensity to homogenize and distill rock's historically plural, contingent and racially-impure roots and to sublimate the genre—especially since the British Invasion (from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones to Led Zeppelin, Yes, King Crimson and others)—as essentially a white youth art-form, image driven, increasingly over-sophisticated, and controlled by big music business. Such rock would serve as one instrument sustaining what Ulrich Beck has termed as "methodological nationalism" (Rooted 17) or the nation-state logic based on censure and limit.

Punk, by contrast, was an "intentionally and aggressively amateur" (Goldberg 181), Do It Yourself (DIY) aesthetic propelled by egalitarian, pluriversal, and radically democratic ethos. Punk rockers demanded stripping popular music of its unnecessary, artsy pretense or, as Rose Lee Goldberg puts it, "stagnation and academicism associated with... establishment" (181) as well as of its purely commodified function in the entertainment industry. Punk rock was about audience members taking to the stage, ceasing the means of cultural production (not only guitars, drums and mikes but also fashion, poetry, art, film, etc.) and "never repeat[ing] the glaring abuses of an earlier rock aristocracy" (Reynolds 5). Punk rock was also, as Simon Reynolds says, a "theatre of rage, disgust and nihilism" (4), an aesthetic "characterized by torn trousers, wild uncombed hair and ornaments of safety-pins, razor blades and tattoos" (Goldberg 182) suggestive of profound generational disillusion and angst. The Movement held that, in Reynolds' words, "the only authority is the self" (22). The goal was to find one's unique voice and radically, sometimes violently or self-destructively, express it against the straightjacket of social and aesthetic norms, conventions, and limits. Punk rock stood as an "in your face" and "out loud" challenge to the hegemonic axiology of propriety, generic purity but also to the hippie culture which, by glorifying indulgence in drugs and free love, anesthetized rock's original prophetic promise. Punk rock was about feeling *it* again, that is it was about the three R's of rejecting, rebelling, and regenerating. For the above reasons, the phenomenon of punk aesthetic can be compared to earlier avant-garde movements like Dada, the Futurists, and the Beats.

In the American context, it can also be said that punk or at least the punk I am interested in here, reinvigorated the ideals of the Popular Front of the 1930s. "The Popular Front," Michael Denning reminds us, "was an insurgent social movement forged around anti-fascism, anti-lynching, and the militant industrial unionism" (61). Many American punk bands also considered themselves as part of an insurgent and egalitarian movement founded on class consciousness and the ideals of the anti-fascist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist people's art which would blare out frustrations of the subaltern. Most American youths of the first wave of punk were born in the late 1950s and grew up in a peculiar era of social unrest (Civil Rights, Free Speech, the Vietnam War), race riots, and burning cities. While the National Guard contained unrest around the nation and the Cold War unfolded, TV and popular entertainment provided social and moral sedatives. Until the late 1970s, schools carried out safety drills which programmed children and adolescents to live in a state of constant subliminal anxiety over the imminent nuclear annihilation (Watt). The drill served as one more cognitive artifact which rationalized, the anti-war movement notwithstanding, the massive expansion of both overt and covert American military interventionism around the globe. Watt thus describes the atmosphere of growing up in the nuclear era:

> They used to test the nuclear war warning sirens on the last Friday of every month.... But whenever that would happen we would think what does that mean?... I always had a fear in my mind of, you know, the big war coming.... *So this thing always weighed on me*. And this thing in class, hide under the tables.... A lot of the Minutemen stuff, like the whole name of our first record, *Paranoid Time* [1980], is us just kinda freaking out. (Watt; my emphasis)

The 1970s and 80s brought new anxieties and fears. Cuts in social spending, the collapse of industries and the War on Drugs undermined, if not destroyed, the social fabric of many vulnerable communities, provoking mass insecurity. Schools, TV, the mass media, and arena rock trained American youths in the hegemonic narratives and afforded a seduction of, if only temporary, oblivion, but there was also an ever-present irritant which "weighed" on and uneased perhaps the most, if on a subconscious level, those most sensitive members of the society: the youth. In response, some youngsters turned to street and gang violence or indulged in substance abuse. Others turned to punk rock, for punk—fast, loud, and adrenaline-driven— was in its ends not unlike the Viennese "actionism" of the previous decade which performer Otto Mühl defined as "not only a form of art, but above all an existential attitude" (qtd. in Goldberg 164). Like actionism, punk offered a purifying, ritual-like medium through which one—as a performer or as a participant—could channel and release those unresolved tensions and ideally, by so doing, acquire as if a new set of eyes or cognitive skills which could enable a distancing from official narratives and values underpinning the social relations. In other words, punk both afforded and was

expressive of a shift in consciousness, and it is in this sense that, especially in its early phase, it was a movement for a non-conformist, anti-elitist social transformation, and personal *as well as* collective empowerment. Had he been alive, Woody Guthrie, the bard of the Popular Front, would no doubt have played punk. If Guthrie's guitar sported the slogan "This Machine Kills Fascists," songs by, for example, the racially-mixed Dead Kennedys from San Francisco, proclaimed similar discontent—their "Nazi Punks Fuck Off," "California Über Alles," "Holiday in Cambodia," and "Kill the Poor" became instant classics of radical social critique. Minutemen's song "Bob Dylan Wrote Propaganda Songs" helps explain this genealogy for, if Dylan was a descendant of Guthrie, Watt considers himself a descendant of Dylan. On the cover of their compilation *Ballot Result* (1986), Watt wrote of the song: "the title is an affirmation of my view of my tunes at that time. I was worried that my tunes might be narrow, then I turned to my *proxy-dad, Bobby Dylan* and felt better about it right away, of course I meant propaganda in the passionate sense" (my emphasis).

The Bags

A band that, as Watt recalls, "empowered" him and his friend D. Boon to join the Movement was The Bags. Watt says: "That was the first punk band we saw. And I look at D. Boon and the first thing out of my mouth was 'We can do this'" (Watt). The Bags was not a typical punk rock band. Formed in 1977 in East L.A., a predominantly Mechicano community, the group was fronted by two women: vocalist Alice Bag, aka Alicia Armendariz, and bass player Pat Bag, aka Patricia Morrison. In the context of what is usually described as a male-dominated punk rock scene and Latino culture, the band's multiethnic line-up and the lead role of two females illustrate the ethnic and gender parity encouraged and embodied by the L.A. punk rock scene. A website operated by the Smithsonian Institution and dedicated to preserving the legacy of Latinos/as in U.S. popular culture describes Armendariz as follows: "Her furious screams would define the aggressive vocal style of the time.... her voice created a thick dissonant texture—a trademark of the early punk sound that echoed L.A. tension" ("East L.A. Punk"). The tension that the authors of this note have in mind is that between at least two separate, although not impermeable, zones Los Angeles has been historically divided into: the predominantly white Hollywood and West Los Angeles separated by the Los Angeles River and multiple freeways from East L.A. As a lyricist, Alice Bag brought those tensions front and center, often referencing her own experiences. As an example, consider her song "We Don't Need the English": "We don't need the English / telling us what we should be / We don't need the English / with their boring songs of anarchy / telling us what we should wear."

Bag, not unlike Thomas Jefferson two hundred years before her, declares independence from the English. Instead of the king, it is the British punk music— "songs of anarchy" alludes to Sex Pistols' song "Anarchy in the U.K."—and fashion imports that she severs ties with. The severance could be interpreted in terms of what

Harold Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence" or "the anguish of contamination" (xi) by a stronger precursor against which she attempts to rebel. In Bloom's theory of poetry, such acts of rebellion by a poetic child against a powerful forebear ultimately lead to the defeat of the newcomer and a reassertion of the master's influence. José E. Limón, however, questions Bloom's claims as "ahistorical and asocial" (138). In his study of the oral poetic tradition of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Limón advocates that in studies of intertextual or dialogic relations, we should inquire about "sociohistorical contexts and constraints" and argues that "a particular poem may be read simultaneously as a manifestation of the 'anxiety of influence' *and* the effects of social change" (138). He concludes: "a history of literary relations cannot ignore their obvious immersion in social process" (140).

What social context should we factor in so that we do not reduce Bag's song to a repressed, inadvertent homage to Sex Pistols? I believe that Bag's Mechicano, bicultural and transnational background, as well as the reality of growing up in the borderlands, is the key. Born in L.A. to Mexican immigrant parents, she would, she confesses in her memoir *Violence Girl* (2011), visit Ciudad Juarez in Mexico "every summer" (34). Her first language was Spanish as her "father, being a proud Mexicano, banned the speaking of English in our home" (42). Although this ensured that, as Bag says, "I would always maintain a firm grasp on my mother tongue," it also created some "major challenges... on the English-speaking front" (42). As a consequence, her English-language acquisition was slow. Like millions of Mexican-American youths before and after her, she found the American educational system hostile to Spanish speakers. Bag recalls that her second-grade English teacher, Miss Gibbons, "would go on to punish me for not learning English quickly enough" (38). Miss Gibbons treated her and other children "who weren't fluent English speakers" with disdain, "like idiots, talked down to us and gave us easy work" (38). If she caught them speaking Spanish, she would punish them by "[keeping] us in from recess" (38). Thus, Bag learnt early on about the unequal relations between the two distinct languages and cultures in her own hometown. Faced with what Ulrich Beck in another context refers to as "exclusive differentiation" (*Cosmopolitan* 5), she was forced to daily relativize her Mexican identity vis-à-vis the expectations of assimilation to the dominant American culture. At the same time, the "[s]ummers in Juarez really cemented [her] pride in [her] Mexican heritage" (Bag 36) and taught her to relativize the American mainstream. In both countries, she was simultaneously from "here and there" or as the Mexican saying goes "*ni de aqui, ni de alla* [neither from here nor from there]," a positionality characteristic of transnational or, in Vertovec's words, "'diaspora consciousness' marked by dual or multiple identifications" (6).

Bag also realized that in the real America, a state founded on racism, she could never fit the essentialist national paradigm, for she was not only internally bicultural but also visibly different—brown. An incident from 1978 can illustrate this. During a day trip to Mexico, one of Bag's friends purchased a bag of heroin and decided to smuggle it back to the U.S. At the Tijuana/San Diego checkpoint punk's

"merry pranksters" declared their nationality: "We're US citizens." The officer "looked at me. 'Where are you from?' he asked. 'Los Angeles,' I replied.… 'What part?' He was still staring at me suspiciously. 'East L.A.' I answered. It started to dawn on me that he was more concerned about illegal immigrants than illegal narcotics" (300).

It was the world of sound and music that provided Bag with a model for the negotiation of the diasporic experience, linguistic alienation, and racial and ethnic oppression. At home, her mother listened to *novelas* and Mexican radio dramas. Her dad loved *ranchera* music by the likes of Pedro Infante, Lucha Villa, and others. Her sister was ten years older and adored "Motown and the Beatles" (Bag 42). As a teenager, she would collect "the back catalogs of Elton John and David Bowie" and Queen, intrigued by their music and gender-bending flamboyance. She also "loaded up on the Kinks, Dave Clark Five, Aretha Franklin and Koko Taylor" (104), New York Dolls, Kiss, Camel, and many more. In other words, despite the constraints she encountered in the outside world, the music she listened to provided her with a model of "imaginary coherence" (Hall qtd. in Vertovec 6) with which to reconcile the seemingly incompatible differences and malleable identities. Her diasporic experience, educational and cultural alienation, and musical inspirations all contributed to Armendariz becoming an expert in infinite translations and infinitesimal border crossings. As if by default then, she developed a hybrid, plural, fluid, multi-local consciousness producing, what Vertovec calls "a multiplicity of histories, 'communities' and selves—a refusal of fixity often serving as a valuable resource for resisting repressive local and global situations" (7), and which therefore can be termed as transnational and cosmopolitan.

Southern California's myth of Anglo monoculturalism and its divisive character, as well as, on the other hand, the paradigm of "the multiple, fluid formation of identity through contact, motion, diaspora and hybridity" (Campbell and Kean 18) constitute then the context which is, I want to argue, more important in interpreting the words of the song than those overt allusions to English punk. The latter serve only to wittily conceal a much more immediate albeit uncanny social protest. They are expressive not so much of an anxiety of influence of the British master-code but of a rebellion against the socio-cultural status-quo back home. Bag performs a dialog not with art but with life.

Following Tomkins' assertion that "toxic scenes… demand antitoxic scripts, in which fire is fought with fire" (857), Bag's song can be interpreted as an expression of the affect of anger directed at the reality of life in LA, as well as an anthem of cultural sovereignty pronounced in spite of the unilateral enunciation of the gringo world, be it the one from across the Atlantic, that located west of the Los Angeles River or that represented by the violence of Miss Gibbons's classes or the border officer's gaze. The song offers an outsider-insider view which operates by angrily (guitar noise, Bag's scream and legendary frown) asserting the right to rebel against the dominant culture. Tomkins explains that "antitoxic anger scripts" are "anger-reparative" or "anger-remedial" for they "are intended to punish and defeat adversaries" in order "to make

the world better" (873). Bag's song seems to be just that, an anger-remedial script offered in the hope of "repair or remediation of the damages or limitations of [her and her community's] life space" (Tomkins 857). Thus "We Don't Need the English" translates into: "We are at home here," "We belong here," and "We demand respect"—an insolent jab at the foundations of the bounded Nation and its myth of origin.

Crucially, the song is articulated in English and in a quintessential riff-driven punk idiom, thus suggesting that the rebellion depends for its efficacy not on outright negation—that would be impossible and counterproductive—but, rather, on strategic appropriation and distancing. José Esteban Muñoz calls this kind of aesthetic strategy "disidentification" or "a performative mode of tactical recognition" (97) of the dominant code which it uses "as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (31).

Los Illegals

Another band from the vibrant East L.A scene was Los Illegals, formed in 1979 and fronted by vocalist and world-class Chicano visual artist/muralist Willie Herón. The title of their first album, *Internal Exile* (1983), encapsulates their transnational, hemispheric, *otro lado* [from the other side] perspective on Los Angeles. On the one hand, it names the existential condition of otherness many Mexican-Americans feel in their own homeland and hometown, as it points not only to the social and economic oppression of the "outcasts" from American "cultural insiderdom" (Campbell and Kean 17) but also indicates that the consequences of this oppression are epistemic estrangement and psychological alienation. On the other hand, it also suggests that the founding paradigms of the American Nation hinge upon a Freudian-type of repression of its Others, the abject millions pushed to the Nation's dark subconscious. The band's very name is bilingual and translates as "The Illegals." It references one group, the undocumented immigrants, who have been subject to expurgation from the Nation's conscience and consciousness by a dehumanizing rhetorical device of "illegal aliens." They live, however, in the Nation's underbelly. The band and its oeuvre attack the moral bankruptcy of the nation-state that produces and rejects them.

Claiming "prestige from below" (Lipsitz 16) and proudly naming themselves as Illegals, the group inverted the top-down hierarchy of the Nation, which builds its power upon claims to a bounded and secure national territory and requires the legality of residence confirmed by proper papers, that is, by the authority of literacy. The name expresses the group's ethos, which embraces and valorizes illegitimacy. Their work, "tight, well-crafted sound that was more new wave than punk" (Doe 94) with vernacular lyrics in Spanish, English, and Spanglish, proclaims the primacy of oral forms of cultural expression and transmission.

Los Illegals' song "El Lay" may serve as an example of their strategies of defamiliarizing the cohesion of the national narrative. The title is a play on the words L.A. and the Spanish for "law" in which, in the words of José David Saldívar, they

expose "the moral hypocrisy of Los Angeles" (288) by screaming about the ongoing economic exploitation of Mexican immigrants and their deportations by the *migra* despite them being productive and tax-paying ("*pagamos impuestos*") members of the society and despite the state's need for migrant workers. Saldívar calls the song a "transnational anthem," in which "Los Illegals represent Los Angeles as it actually is for the millions of *indocumentados/as* and unhomely" (286):

> *Parado en la esquina*
> *Sin rumbo sin fin*
> *Estoy in El Lay,*
> *No tengo donde ir*
> *Un hombre se acercó,*
> *Mi nombre preguntó*
> *Al no saber su lengua,*
> *Con el me llevó*
> *Esto es el precio*
> *Que pagamos*
> *Cuando llegamos*
> *A este lado?*
> *Jalamos y pagamos impuestos*
> *Migra llega y nos da unos fregasos*
> *El Lay, L. A.*
> *El Lay, L. A.*
> *El Lay, L. A.*
> *El Lay, L. A.*
> *El Lay, L. A.*
> *En un camión,*
> *Sin vuelta me pusieron*
> *Por lavar platos en El Lay me deportaban*
> *Mirar por el cristal,*
> *Sentí pertenecer*
> *Un millión ilegales, no podemos fallar*
> *Esto es el precio*
> *Que pagamos*
> *Cuando llegamos*
> *A este lado?*
> *Y porque no—podemos quedar*
> *Que Gronk, no borro la frontera?*
> *El Lay, L. A.*
> *Manos fijadas,*
> *Al fin en la frontera*
> *Lo dije que quería,*
> *Mejorar la vida*
> *Familia sin futuro, falta de respeto*
> *Adonde fue,*
> *La libertad y justicia?*

[Standing on the corner / Got nowhere to go / I'm here in El Lay, Got no place to stay / A man came up to me / And he asked me my name / Couldn't speak his language so he took me away / Is this the price / You have to pay / When you come / To the USA? / We come to work, we pay our taxes / Migra comes and they kick us on our asses / El Lay L. A. / He threw me on the bus / That headed one way / I was being deported, for washing dishes in El Lay / Looking out the window, / I felt I belonged / A million illegals, we can't all be wrong / Is this the price / You have to pay / When you came / To the USA / I don't know why, we cannot stay / Didn't Gronk erase the border yesterday? / We ended at the border, / Hands above my head / I told him all I wanted, / Was a chance to get ahead / No future for my family, can't even get respect / What happened to the liberty / And the justice that we get?] (qtd. and trans. Saldívar 286-287)

Herón's and visual artist/performer Gronk's lyrics delivered over a wall of "over-amplified electric guitars and dizzying Afro-Cuban drumming" (Saldívar 288) record a story which has been continually recapitulated in consecutive generations—most recently in the vicious demonization and deportations of Mexican migrants in the Trump era—and which is a quintessential story of transnationalism, diaspora, belonging, and exile, of a dream offered and continually deferred. It is a story of immoral injustice. Narrating the border between the two nations—located not out there on the periphery but right here, on the streets of Los Angeles—the song highlights the crisis of contradiction at the heart of America: its lofty national ideology colliding against its insatiable appetite, which calls for and consumes the Other as raw material upon which the Nation's prosperity is built. *El ley* or the law of L.A. is thus the law of a gringo monster for which the values of liberty and justice are, at least as seen from below or a street corner, hollow signifiers. And the reaction of the Lyrical I "looking out the window" is one of incomprehension. The feeling of belonging clashes with the reality of deportation resulting in the protagonist's apathy, exhaustion, paralysis, moral confusion, humiliation ("no respect"), and therefore depression if by "depression" is meant, as Tomkins says, "a syndrome of shame and distress, which also reduces the general amplification of impulses" (355). This state of consciousness can also be described as Fredric Jameson's "death of the subject" (20).

If the Lyrical I of "El Lay" is the victim of the Nation's movement, which not only rejects the "illegal," foreign body but also tramples upon its humanity, the band's politics underscored ethnic pride, as well as their cross-cultural identity. This can be illustrated by the nomination of the "pachuco punk" they coined for their music and which reflects their bicultural sensibility and underscores the pride they took in the tradition of Mexican Los Angeles which the pachuco subculture of the 1930s and 1940s came to be synonymous with. In the era of what McWilliams calls the "iron curtain" (239) of racist prohibitions in Los Angeles, pachucos' over-the-top, flamboyant attires known as zoot suits or drapes were an eye-sore for the mainstream.

Zoot suits were part of the black fashion aesthetic as examples of Cab Calloway or Malcolm X illustrate. Therefore, the drapes symbolized also a type of cross-ethnic affinity exploding the dogmas of racial purity of the dominant culture. The pachucos' street presence brought to a halt the codes of propriety of the white settler society. Moral pundits detested them. Newspapers "seized upon the zoot suit as a 'badge of crime'" (McWilliams 243) creating a moral panic which culminated in the infamous Zoot Suit Riots of July 1943. Unapologetically the Other, pachucos were ideal icons not only for Chicano/a punk rockers.[1] Poet José Montoya, a veteran of the 1960s Chicano Movement, calls pachucos reverently: "Chicano freedom fighters ahead of their time" (135). To claim that legacy in the punk era was to celebrate a historical presence of a different nation within the Nation, it was to celebrate hybridity, and prestige from below. And, because, as McWilliams notes, "nothing makes for cohesiveness more effectively than a commonly shared hostility" (241) the adoption of the pachuco as an emblem of cultural pride signaled an acknowledgement and denouncement of historical and ongoing discrimination against the *Mexicano* community.

Other monikers Los Illegals used to describe their music with—"mariachi punk, heavy mambo, psycho cha cha, techno-flamenco, and flamenco metal" (Guerrero)—also reflected this type of consciousness which underscores a coexistence of difference within one body. And this type of bifocality was reflected not only in the group's nomenclature or musical textures but also in their activism. Wanting "to bring people from the West Side to see groups from the East Side" ("East L.A. Punk") Herón co-founded a weekly punk club called Vex in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of East L.A. The club featured Chicano/a punk rock outfits (The Brat, The Undertakers, the Odd Squad) alongside Westside bands like X and The Blasters (Guerrero). It became a venue where punks from different parts of the city came to dialog and cross-pollinate. As a result, the Westside was Mexicanized or subjected to "*pachucada*," while Eastside bands found opportunity to play in Hollywood and beyond. All in all, Los Illegals were programmatically differential and, in this sense, also transnational or cosmopolitan.

Minutemen

Of course, Los Angeles is about much more than a binary split into East and West, and so was its punk rock scene. For example, Black Flag, pioneers of hardcore punk, were based in Hermosa Beach, the South Bay region of the greater metropolitan Los Angeles. And from another southern town, the port of San Pedro, came Minutemen.

San Pedro is a racially and ethnically mixed working class town. Watt says: "our community's got a lot of Latin, it's got a lot of Italians, got Slavs, when we were

---

1   Perhaps the most outstanding homage to the pachuco culture is Luis Valdez's play *Zoot Suit* which premiered at Los Angeles' Mark Taper Forum in 1978. Valdez moved the play to Broadway in 1979 and, in 1981, directed its film adaptation. The play was successfully revived under Valdez's direction in the spring of 2017 at the Mark Taper Forum.

an immigrant town. The whole tuna industry, chicken of the sea. That comes out of Pedro." It was there that Minutemen, a power trio of guitar, bass, and drums was formed in 1980. They recorded four albums and eight EPs released on Black Flag's SST label. They immediately gained popularity and were about to break into the mainstream when, in December 1985, guitarist/singer Dennes D. Boon died in a car crash. If their career was short-lived, their impact was lasting—the band's influence is detectable in the work of, for example, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Jane's Addiction, and others.

Propelled by one of So-Cal's funkiest drummers, George Hurley, they played high energy genre-bending material mixing hardcore punk with funk, jazz, psychedelic, experimental, and acoustic rock. Their motto was "We jam econo." Their songs offered more for less—rarely longer than two minutes, they were packed with changes of tempo and rhythm, surprising melodic and chord progressions. From the English band Wire they took a liking to abstract, unorthodox, open-ended forms. As Watt explains: "band like Wire, you don't have to have verse, chorus, verse, chorus, you just put it the way you want it!" For Minutemen, punk was synonymous with liberation of the self and nullification of borders: "Band like the Pop Group. If you like Captain Beefheart, if you like Funkadelic, put them in the same band. That's what the Movement showed us. Movement was never [about] style of music.… Some skater made a sticker, and that was a quote from D. Boon, 'Punk is whatever we made it to be.'" Motivated by a working class populist ethos, they made *it* first and foremost radically egalitarian in their sound or, as Watt says, Minutemen was "democracy in action" (*We Jam Econo*). Motown's soul and funk productions inspired them to set each instrumentalist sonically apart. D. Boon enhanced treble on his guitar (making it sound almost country-like) in order to "leave room" (Watt) for Watt's dense, distorted, virtuoso bass lines and Hurley's powerful beats on raucous drums and sparkling cymbals. "[T]hat's why D. Boon said the politics was in The Minutemen," says Watt. In other words, their music thrived on contradictions continuously coming into contact. In this sense, the band's sound reflected a radical idealism, an openness to a pluriversum of ideas from around the world. It represented a utopian space which can be interpreted as transnational and transcultural. In his post-Minutemen work, Watt has continued this legacy by engaging in collaborative and often transnational projects.[2]

If their music-making was idealistic and idiosyncratic, so was their approach to writing lyrics. On the one hand, heeding D. Boon's suggestion that "[w]hatever we play just let them know it's the Minutemen" (Watt), the lyricists Watt and Boon were bent on capturing the state of their personal consciousness. The lyrics were to capture,

---

2 Watt has collaborated, for example, with Italian musicians Andrea Belfi (drums) and Stefano Pilia (guitar) in the already-mentioned Il Sogno del Marinaio. Brother's Sister's Daughter is a project of Watt, Nels Cline (Wilco), and two Japanese musicians Araki Yūko, and Shimzu Hirotaka. CUZ is Watt's collaborative project with Brighton-based Sam Dook.

what Boon called "thinking out loud" (Watt) and bring to the fore a ground-level local point of view. This was best done, as many Watt's lyrics illustrate, by lyrical snapshots, free-association, imagist haikus, "[a]lmost cinema, movies. I am doing scenes. So little drama, little scene, little piece of Pedro, me and D. Boon… so we try to bring real personal things" (Watt). Parallel to this theme of auto-mythologization, many of Minutemen's songs evince a political consciousness and concern with the world at large. It is here that that context of transnationalism comes into play, particularly in their critique of U.S. global military interventionism and, more specifically, its meddling in Latin America. Watt recalls: "D. Boon belonged to an organization called CISPES, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. He took me to a meeting once. I think I asked some embarrassing question, like 'Are we getting any guns?'" They understood not only the explicit rationale behind American policies—"the whole idea [of American interventionism]… goes back to our second [fifth] president, who says, 'This is our backyard.' James Monroe, little guy, Tommy Jefferson's friend" (Watt)—but also were aware of the discursively-maintained hegemonic consensus around these issues: "this whole idea… you're being taught stuff in school and they are not just things to answer on tests." Watt highlights here the existence of cognitive presumptions which, buttressed by racism and derogatory prejudices, generate fantasies of U.S. normative grandeur or exceptionality against the backdrop of Latin American "indolence." In the interview, Watt illustrates this by bringing up Mexico's real name: "It's just like ours… the United States of Mexico.... It's the same fucking name but nobody calls it that. Why?" Watt finds in this a concise illustration of America's normative programming of disdain for members of the hemispheric family which, fundamentally, serves to repress the dark side of the U.S. It is—to quote D. Boon's song "Price of Paradise" featured on their last album *Three Way Tie (For Last)* (1985)—"a paradise… stained with blood," where war is a financial investment and "young men die for greed." Aiming to counter this logic, Watt recalls, the band felt a "kinship with Latin America" and planned to organize the "*real* American tour—North, Central, South.… that was a huge dream for us."

Songs "I Felt like a Gringo" by Watt from the *Buzz or Howl under the Influence of Heat* (SST 1983) and "Corona" by D. Boon from *Double Nickels on the Dime* (SST 1984) were inspired by the band's day trip to Mexico made on 4 July 1982. Both songs ingeniously correlate a personal self-examination, a transnational political critique, and the examination of the psyche of the Nation. In "I Felt like a Gringo" Watt says:

> Got a ton of white boy guilt, that's my problem,
> Obstacle of joy, one reason to use some drugs.
> Slept on a Mexican beach slept in trash—American trash
> Thinking too much can ruin a good time.
>
> I asked a Mexican who ran a bar for Americans
> 'Who won' I said 'The election?'
> He laughed, I felt like a gringo,

They played a song and they had some fun with us.

Why can't you buy a good time? Why are there soldiers in the street?
Why'd I spend the fourth in someone else's country?

The Lyrical I, a young American man on a hedonistic trip across the border, suddenly realizes the work of "things not just to answer on tests," those tacit mental habits that should ensure "a good time" and a clear conscience. Somehow yet, the "white boy guilt" begins to weigh on him like a "ton": finding himself in "someone else's country" and allowed a glance at the United States from the other side, he realizes his undeserved privileges. He feels like a gringo. Following Silvan S. Tomkins' assertion that "guilt is another form of the affect of shame-humiliation" (361), it can be said that, for Watt, to feel like a "*gringo*" is to experience self-conscious shame and humiliation. This is akin to self-alienation, that moment when one finds out prose, not poetry, is one's tongue. This shame-humiliation arises as a result of what Watt witnesses abroad—American trash on a Mexican beach, Mexican elections controlled by "soldiers on the street," a sarcastic laughter of a Mexican man—which momentarily alienates him from his own American identity built on hegemonic consumer certainties. To them, Watt realizes, he is morally complicit. Hence his loss of agency and subjectivity, and his communion with the Other: "*They* played a song and *they* had some fun with us" (my emphasis).

On U.S. Independence Day, he escapes the rituals of gregarious patriotism, its metaphorical and literal fireworks. Abroad, the contrast is striking and Watt is brought to a halt. Noticing soldiers actively manipulating the election process by giving out bread on the street, Watt recalls, forced him to put in parenthesis the idea of democracy encapsulated in the Declaration of Independence not only in Mexico but also in the U.S. Estranged from himself, he comes to an understanding that his recreation at a Mexican resort comes at a cost of unequal relations between the two countries. The image of American "trash on the beach" signifies not only the American transnational corporations' stranglehold over Mexico's economy and Mexico's role as a waste dump for the U.S. It is also an ingenious metaphor for hemispheric (if not global), geographic and environmental relatedness. In other words, it conjures an imaginary horizon of transnational flows of economic resources and practices, as well as of natural phenomena; currency rates *and* ocean currents; the "global fluids" (Beck, "Rooted Cosmopolitanism" 21).

The song is also an indictment of tourism's complicity in sustaining America's tendency to privilege consumerism and tourist escapism mechanisms of moral evasion or ethical anesthesia. It indicates the toll the myth of a "good time" takes—a profound sense of alienation from both the hemispheric neighbors and the putative, taken for granted moral order back home. This is an important message to repeat today because, by focusing on illegal immigration, current debates about the border and the border wall represent cross-border human flow and the filtering

function of the border as almost exclusively unilateral South-to-North process.

In place of a resolution, the song ends in a series of rhetorical questions. They stand for the aporia Americans encounter when instead of the exotic/erotic promise of the South, encapsulated equally by Tijuana brothels and Herb Alpert's Mariachi Brass Band, the borderlands experience brings to the fore problems which precipitate the affective surge of guilt and loss of agency. Tompkins claims that "the nature of the experience of shame guarantees a perpetual sensitivity to any violation of the dignity of man" (358). In other words, following the loss of self, the narrator of the song is speaking to us already morally transformed, pluralized; something of *them* has remained and will live on in him. Thus, the moment of the guilt tsunami is a direct signal of contingency and plurality. It puts into question the "either/or" linearity and insularity as principles upon which the violence of exclusive differentiation upholds physical and mental borders.

"The border stands waiting for us to cross, or to detain us, but we are not supposed to live there," says Roger Barta (11). Yet this is precisely where Watt is now, a *gringo*, a resident of the borderlands. If "[t]he border is a line that demands straightforward behavior" (Barta 11), Watt now knows his strategy to become and remain whole must be both ingeniously "tangential" (Barta 11) and ethically activist. For him, it is a strategy of disidentification which calls for bartender's irony, a good song and a dose of ambivalence or that which Roger Barta calls "cleverly evading or escaping trouble confronted not head on but at an angle" (11).

A similar split in the consciousness—a sense of guilt stemming from a borderlands recreation and an ethical turn after a revelatory halt—can be identified in D. Boon's "Corona." "Corona" is a popular Mexican beer brand that stands here as a symbol of cheap ("five-cent deposit") entertainment Americans seek across the border:

> The people will survive
> In their environment
> The dirt, scarcity, and the
> Emptiness of our south
> The injustice of our greed
> The practice we inherit
> The dirt, scarcity and the
> Emptiness of our south
> There on the beach
> I could see it in her eyes
> I only had a Corona
> Five cent deposit

The song begins almost as an anthem. D. Boon sings his heart out about the resilience of the "people." He is singing about the "in-their-environment" people. This is then a declaration of independence from coloniality, expressed in solidarity with the Indigenous people of Mexico and, by extension, of all of the Western hemisphere. The

South he witnesses, its "dirt, scarcity and emptiness," is the proverbial Valley of Ashes of the U.S. It is a site that provokes self-examination. He realizes the interdependence and the entanglements between different parts of the continent. This provokes a self-indictment: it is "*our* greed," passed down among *us* for generations that has produced this. In other words, the song records a surge of shame-humiliation over a collective moral guilt incurred by the U.S., the Nation, for its relationship with its southern neighbor, *our* junk yard.

In the second stanza, the repetition of "dirt, scarcity and emptiness of our south" reflected in the woman's eyes suggests that it is not a Mexican but the speaker's own, American, guilt he now sees. In this sense, he has been transformed and transnationalized if, as Beck holds, "[t]ransnationality refers to a revolution in loyalties" ("Rooted Cosmopolitanism" 19). "There on the beach" the experience is recorded as it unfolds. Tomkins teaches us that shame is communicated by the face, "[w]hen one hangs one's head or drops one's eyelids or averts one's gaze" (360). When D. Boon reverts to his "only" Corona and engages in banality of the "deposit," he is seeking such flight from shame. Tomkins says the act of looking in "the eyes of the other" (360) is directly connected with the taboo of shame. When we are put to shame, we turn our eyes away communicating and in doing so compounding shame: "both the face and the self unwittingly become more visible, to the self and others" (360). It is in this sense that "self-consciousness and shame are tightly linked" (360). D. Boon's lines give poetic body to Tomkins's model and embellish it as a moral transformation.

What is interesting about "Corona" is that in its few lines it is able to go from a political anthem into a deeply personal confession of self-defeat and back into a reassertion of resilience. If Watt retains in his song strategic "tangentiality," D. Boon's chorus ("the people will survive") has a more direct activist appeal of "ethical glocalism" (Beck, "Rooted Cosmopolitanism" 27). The difference is in spirit not in substance, for both now have developed what Beck calls "a perpetual sensitivity to any violation of the dignity of man," and have replaced the "either/or" logic of the "methodological nationalism" and "state-centered perspective" with "a multinational 'this as well as that'" ("Rooted Cosmopolitanism" 17-19).

To conclude, each of the songs discussed here offers a distancing from the hegemonic Anglo-American (gringo) national ideology, epistemology, axiology, and historical imagination by focusing and bringing to the fore the experiential dimension of a specific place: the contact zone of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. At the border, the methodological nationalism grinds to a halt as do the governing paradigms by which the mainstream American discourse and capital envision the U.S. in relation to its Others, either at home in "El Lay" or on the other side of the fence. It is the mainstream narrative in its ordered "either/or" linearity that is being othered here. All the songs examined above are anthems of independence from such a narrative of the Nation; if the Nation is understood, as Beck teaches us, to deny the otherness of the Other, then these songs can be taken to encapsulate "cosmopolitanism [which] is a recognition of the otherness of the Other" ("Rooted Cosmopolitanism" 26).

The Bags's song affirms the Other's agentive independence from the master-code by rehearsing the antitoxic anger script; Los Illegals renounce the gringo Nation's immoral work of exploitation/humiliation and stand in solidarity with the victims of transnational depression; Minutemen's songs record these transformative moments when the Lyrical I slips into the Other's shoes or, by the ladder of shame, ascends into a higher form of consciousness when the self disintegrates and one begins to perceive the universal humanity and our (unequal) relatedness. Beck proposes the term "cosmopolitanization" to describe "the interrelation between de- and re-nationalization, de- and re-ethicization, de- and re-localization" (*Cosmopolitan* 94). It seems to me that the songs discussed above constitute *par-excellence* spaces of cosmpolitanization because they are concerned with distancing oneself (or being distanced by forces beyond one's control) from the Nation and readjusting one's loyalties and moral compass anew.

In the case of Minutemen's songs, we can call this process of disintegration and refashioned readjustment to the Nation as the affect of a *gringo*. To be "gringoized" this way is to step onto the arena of disidentification, ambivalence, to practice "double consciousness," to experience the Jamesonian "death of the subject." It is to share in the condition hitherto reserved for the Nation's Other. These songs teach us how to approach such moments with dignity and honesty, so that they are turned into salutary or remedial instances of moral regeneration.

Beck says that cosmopolitanism "has become the defining feature of… the era of reflexive modernity, in which national borders and differences are dissolving." This is why, he adds, "a world that has become cosmopolitan urgently demands a new standpoint, the cosmopolitan outlook, from which we can grasp the social and political realities in which we live and act" (*Cosmopolitan* 2). It seems to me—and the punk rock songs studied here confirm this—that the reality of the market, political, ethical, and socio-cultural interdependence and its resultant possibilities defined by Beck as cosmopolitanism had already been palpable in places like Southern California and the Mexican-U.S. borderlands some forty years ago. It is in this sense that Los Angeles punk rock artists discussed above, as well as a number of other groups from the region, should be classified as belonging to "the exemplary communities of the transnational moment," a term I adopt here after Kachig Tölölyan, who proposed it to refer to ethnic diasporas (qtd. in Vertovec 4).[3] These artists were the early prophets and practitioners of cosmopolitanization and their words and music can be termed the soundtrack of "the cosmopolitan outlook," which holds, to use Beck's words, "the latent potential to break out of the self-centered narcissism of the national outlook and the dull incomprehension with which it infects thought and action, and thereby enlighten human beings concerning the real, internal cosmopolitanization of their lifeworlds and institutions" (*Cosmopolitan* 2).

---

3   Other Southern California bands which can be included under this category are The Plugz, The Zeros, The Brat, and, the most famous, Los Lobos.

Works Cited

Bag, Alice. *Violence Girl: East L.A. Rage to Hollywood Stage, A Chicana Punk Story*. Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2011. Print.

Barta, Roger. "Introduction." *Warrior for Gringostroika*. By Guillermo Gomez-Peña. San Francisco: Graywolf Press, 1994. 11-12. Print.

Beck, Ulrich. *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge: Polity, 2006. Print.

——. "Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Emerging from a Rivalry of Distinctions." *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*. Ed. Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznaider, Rainer Winter. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003. 19-29. Print.

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. Print.

Campbell, Neil, and Alasdair Kean. *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. New York: Vintage, 1992. Print.

Denning, Michael. "The Laboring of American Culture." *A Concise Companion to American Studies*. Ed. John Carlos Rowe. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 59-73. Print.

Doe, John, Tom DeSavia, and Friends. *Under the Big Black Sun: A Personal History of L.A. Punk*. Boston: Da Capo Press, 2016. Print.

"East L.A. Punk." *American Sabor: Latinos in US Popular Music*. n.d. Web. 12 May 2017.

Goldberg, Rose Lee. *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988. Print.

Guerrero, Mark. "Los Illegals: Pachuco Punk Rockers of the 80s." *Markguerrero.net*. 16 April 2002. Web. 26 Oct. 2016.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003 [1991]. Print.

Limón, José E. "Oral Tradition and Poetic Influence: Two Poets from Greater Mexico." *Redefining American Literary History*. Ed. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward, Jr.. New York: The Modern Language Association, 1990. 124-141. Print.

Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. Print.

McWilliams, Carey. *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968 [1949]. Print.

Minutemen. *Ballot Result*. SST Records, 1987. LP.

Montoya, José. *In Formation: 20 Years of Joda*. San Diego: Chusma House Publications, 1992. Print.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Print.

Reynolds, Simon. *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing about Hip Rock and Hip Hop.* Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2011. Print.

Saldívar, José David. "On the Bad Edge of La Frontera." *Decolonial Voices: Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century*. Ed. Arturo J. Aldama and Naomi H. Quiñonez. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002. 262-296. Print.

Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition. v. 1 & 2.* New York: Springer, 2008. Print.

Vertovec, Steven. *Transnationalism*. London; New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.

Watt, Mike. Personal interview. 22 Oct. 2016.

Florian Zappe

The Other Exceptionalism:
A Transnational Perspective on Atheism in America

Abstract: The United States constitutes an exceptional case in the complex discourse of unbelief in the Western world. Its providential founding myth of being "God's own country" established an idiosyncratically American social imaginary molded by what Robert Bellah has defined as the "American civil religion": a pervasive ideological nexus between the narratives of religion and national identity. This essay shows, on the one hand, how a transnational perspective can contribute to an understanding of the development of this idiosyncrasy. On the other hand, it retraces the distinctly transnational trajectory of some early manifestations of atheist thought in the United States.

Keywords: Atheism, Transnationalism, Social Imaginary, Civil Religion, Ernestine L. Rose, Emma Goldman, Robert N. Bellah, Cornelius Castoriadis, Thomas Paine

> Anti-God is Anti-American
> Anti-American is Treason
> Traitors lead to Civil War
> —Billboard in Monongah,
> West Virginia[1]

> and I am waiting for them to prove
> that God is really American
> —Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "I Am Waiting"

From the transnational vantage point of an observer who has been socialized in a highly secularized Western European society in which questions of religious faith (and the lack thereof) are usually relegated to the private sphere and mostly excluded from public political or cultural debates, the United States is an exceptional case regarding the prominent status of religion in the realm of the social. Yet, despite that circumstance, the following essay does not—at least not primarily—aim to be a contribution to the ongoing discussion of religion in America but rather focuses on its largely underresearched dialectical Other—atheism.

The reflections to follow are based on the premise that American culture constitutes an idiosyncrasy within the complex discourse of unbelief in the so-called

---

1   https://www.alternet.org/belief/10-most-absurd-right-wing-christian-billboards

Western world. The United States' providential founding myth of being "God's own country" established a unique socio-cultural imaginary molded by what Robert Bellah has famously defined as the "American civil religion": a pervasive ideological nexus between the narratives of religion and national identity that exceeds the traditional framework of institutionalized churches, specific religious beliefs, denominations and congregations by establishing a cultural semantics in which "'[g]od' has clearly been the central symbol... from the beginning and remains so today" (37). Although seldom expressed explicitly, the question of the "Death of God" has hence always been at the center of the debates about cultural membership and the label "atheist" (as a discursive marker for "otherness") has been frequently employed as an ideological tool to exclude, control, denounce, and oppress undesired forms of cultural, ethnic, gender-based, sexual or political difference.

In the following essay, I want to argue that the normative power of the dominant civil religious social imaginary stifled the development of a pronounced and distinctly American philosophical tradition that could be compared to the rich European tradition of radical advocates of the "Death of God" such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Baudelaire (at least for most of his lifetime), Ludwig Feuerbach, Arthur Schopenhauer, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, or Bertrand Russell. I will further argue that a transnational perspective provides a useful critical lens for an analysis of this phenomenon—in spite of the problematic elusiveness of the concept which is, as Donald Pease has pointed out, "[e]ndowed with minimal analytic consistency [and] devoid of semantic coherence as it is of social existence" (4). However, in spite of—or maybe also because of—this indefinability, it has often been remarked that transnational approaches in American Studies have contributed valuable insights to the understanding of the United States. An external and comparative perspective allows for a critical interrogation of the manifold manifestations of American exceptionalism, for putting a spotlight on diaspora and minority positions—and atheists certainly belong to this category—that are otherwise overlooked and enables us to analyze cross-cultural interdependencies. If we define "the transnational" through these qualities, the concept offers a useful template for the discussion of the question of atheism and its status in American culture. Following Pease's assertion that "[t]he transnational can designate factual states as well as the interpretative framework through which to make sense of them" (4), this approach allows us not only to discern the distinctiveness of the United States' cultural history with regard to the status of atheist thought (as compared to the European tradition) but also to reflect upon its etiology. Secondly, such an approach enables us to discuss the decidedly transnational character of those sparse manifestations of unbelief that had an (albeit limited) effect in the country's intellectual history.

While it is certainly true that every non-Native American worldview—including the Christian faith—owes its presence in U.S. culture to transnational migration, the status of unbelief demands special scholarly attention from a cross-cultural perspective that allows us to point out a specifically American paradox: on

the one hand the United States emerged out of the ideas of the Enlightenment as the first nation in modern history with a decidedly secular constitution which erected "a wall of separation between church and state" as Thomas Jefferson famously put it in his Letter to the Danbury Baptists on Jan. 1, 1802—at a time when Europe's monarchs still derived their political legitimacy of their rule from the "divine right." On the other hand, however, there seems to be no other country in the so-called Western hemisphere in which all levels of politics, culture, and society have been and still are similarly saturated with religious (by far not only Christian) rhetoric, symbolism, and thought. Even today, after the triumph of the cultural model of the "postmodern" allegedly ended the rule of overriding master narratives and increased the acceptance of a broad variety of world views within American culture, the non-believer is still considered to be a disturbance, a manifestation of a fundamental difference. To give just one example: in their article "Atheists As 'Other': Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society" (2006) the sociologists Penny Edgell, Joseph Gerteis, and Douglas Hartman note that

> out of a long list of ethnic and cultural minorities, Americans are less willing to accept intermarriage with atheists than with any other group, and less likely to imagine that atheists share their vision of American society.… We argue that atheists provide an important limiting case to the general narrative of increasing tolerance of religious pluralism in the United States, and that this exception is a useful lens through which to understand Americans' assumptions about the appropriate role of religion in both public and private life. (216)

Until the present day, an open commitment to disbelief can still cause a great level of irritation in the United States. As James A. Haught comments: "Today, sceptics remain misfits in much of American society. No politician could be elected if he admitted atheism. Newspapers and mainstream magazines rarely print agnostic articles. Television programs seldom contain direct denials of God" (14). At the same time, forms of religious rhetoric that may seem irritating from the European perspective are widely accepted even in the most secular spheres of American society. Moreover, public discussions on controversial topics like abortion, creationism, or gay marriage are always tinged with religion, and the debate on the "New Atheists"[2] about a decade ago was conducted with an amount of ferocity that might astonish any non-American observer. This perception has historically been shared by men of letters with a transnational perspective: in his travelogue *What I Saw in America* (1922), Gilbert

---

2   I am referring to Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel C. Dennett, whose critical books on religion caused a lot of controversy especially in America about a decade ago. See: Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror* (2004); Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, (2006); Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: The Case against Religion* (2006).

Keith Chesterton formulated the much-quoted witticism that "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed" (7), whereas Vladimir Nabokov once claimed that the story of a "total atheist who lives a happy and useful life, and dies in his sleep at the age of 106" (314) is one of the few utter taboos in American literature.

The Genesis of a Social Imaginary

How can we make sense of this idiosyncratically American peculiarity regarding the cultural status of atheism and how can a transnational perspective help us to explain its emergence and dynamics? Donald Pease remarks that in the versatile discourses within the field of American studies—before as well as after the so-called transnational turn

> American exceptionalism has been said to refer to clusters of *elements absent*—the absence of feudal hierarchies, class conflicts, a socialist labor party, trade unionism, and divisive ideological passions—and *present*—the presence of a predominant middle class, tolerance for diversity, upward mobility, hospitality toward immigrants as shared constitutional faith, and liberal individualism—that putatively set America apart from other national cultures. (20, emphases added)

The exceptional status of atheism in American culture is equally marked by an absence and a presence: the *absence* of a pronounced and genuinely American philosophical tradition of atheism in the light of the *presence* of a pervasive ideological nexus between the narratives of religion and national identity.

One of the most prominent approaches to explain this link can be found in Sacvan Bercovitch's classic study *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975), which argues that the conflation between these two discourses predates the actual formation of the United States as a political entity. It can be traced back to the Winthropian foundational myth of reading the Puritan colonization of the continent as a divinely ordained mission to erect an exemplary "city upon a hill." As this project was, from its outset, simultaneously political as well as spiritual, it paved the way for the subcutaneous, quasi-theological cultural fabric of the secular republic:

> In retrospect, it seems clear that the Puritan myth prepared for the re-vision of God's Country from the 'New England of the type' into the United States of America. Founded as it was on prophecy, the colonists' view of the New World not only facilitated but dictated the emergence of different forms of expression. It depended for its verification upon more heavenly generations to follow, with ampler terms of exegesis, and a more illustrious American text to interpret.… Early New England rhetoric provided a ready framework for inverting later secular values—human perfectibility, technological progress, democracy, Christian socialism, or simply (and comprehensively) the American Way—into the mold of sacred teleology. (136)

Philip S. Gorski therefore aptly speaks of a conjunction of the "covenant theology of the New England Puritans... and the classical republicanism of the Founding Fathers" (4) as the spark that started the process of the formation of a national identity in the United States. Bellah has termed this phenomenon the American Civil Religion, a concept that, as Charles Taylor has noted, "is understandably and rightly contested today, because some of the conditions of this religion are now being challenged, but there is no doubt that Bellah has captured something essential about American society, both in its inception, and for about two centuries thereafter" (447). The alliance of these two traditions has always been ridden by implicit contradictions and also become manifest in contemporary cultural conflicts in American culture such as the debates on intelligent design, gay marriage, reproductive rights etc., but at the heart the reasons of these clashes lie in a fundamental impasse ingrained in the American Civil Religion. "The confusion today," Taylor notes,

> arises from the fact that there is both continuity and discontinuity. What continues is the importance of some form of the modern idea of moral order. It is this which gives the sense that Americans are still operating on the same principles as the Founders. The rift comes from the fact that what makes this order the right one is, for many though not by any means for all, no longer God's Providence; the order is grounded in nature alone, or in some concept of civilization, or even in supposedly unchallengeable a priori principles, often inspired by Kant. So that some Americans want to rescue the Constitution from God, whereas others, with deeper historical roots, see this as doing violence to it. Hence the contemporary American Kulturkampf. (448)

The civil religion has to be understood as a somewhat paradoxical socio-cultural matrix which is, on the one hand, entrenched in constitutional secularism while at the same time drawing heavily form the religious doctrine:

> Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide *a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life*, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion. (Bellah 24, emphasis added)

Following Bellah's above-quoted claim, according to which "God" is the central signifier of America's cultural identity, we can assert that the civil religion constitutes a *social imaginary,* understood along the lines of Cornelius Castoriadis's definition as that particular element

which gives a specific orientation to every institutional system, which overdetermines the choice and the connections of symbolic networks, which is the creation of each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence, its world, and its relations with this world, this originary structuring component, this central signifying-signified, the source of that which presents itself in every instance as an indisputable and undisputed meaning, the basis for articulating what does matter and what does not, the origin of the surplus of being of the objects of practical, affective and intellectual investment, whether individual or collective[.] (145)

Taylor argues that this civil religious social imaginary is the prime integrative force that was able to unite the various social and ethnic groups that comprise the *United States of America*: "That means that a way that Americans can understand their fitting together in society although of different faiths, is through these faiths themselves being seen as in this consensual relation to the common civil religion. Go to your church, but go" (524).[3] In consequence, the individual who does not go to church (or synagogue, mosque, temple etc.) purportedly refuses to enter the social contract of *E pluribus Unum*. In a society in which "one can be integrated as an American *through* one's faith or religious identity" (Taylor 524), the question of the "Death of God" extends beyond debates on metaphysics and moves to the center of the debates of cultural membership. Therefore, the cultural hegemony of the civil religious social imaginary was a tremendous obstacle for the evolution of atheist ideas and is responsible for the aforementioned absence of a decidedly American philosophical tradition of atheism.

Which Atheism?

Atheism is, however, also an elusive concept. It is an essential part of its nature to have, as the English poet Horace Smith once wrote, a "Hydra head" (101) and if one wants to talk about its history in a general and as well as a specifically American context, one has to choose which of its faces to tackle. As the term itself comprises a multiplicity of "isms" rather than representing one coherent philosophical position, Stephen Bullivant suggests to make a distinction between "'positive' (or 'strong'/'hard')

---

3   Taylor also uses the concept of the social imaginary in his book on secularism but he frames it—without referring to Castoriadis' original definition—somewhat differently by differentiating it from social theory: "I speak of 'imaginary' (i) because I'm talking about the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in images, stories, legends etc. But it is also the case that (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society. Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (171-172).

and 'negative' ('weak'/'soft') varieties of atheism" (15). The "negative" manifestations would include philosophical positions such as agnosticism or skepticism, whereas "positive" atheism would denote any *explicit* affirmation of the conviction that metaphysical deities do not and cannot exist (cf. 15-16).

Examined against the backdrop of this distinction, the history of atheism in America seems largely to be a history of *soft or negative atheism*, which manifested itself especially in the form of "freethought," an umbrella term that encompasses deist, agnostic, or otherwise skeptic positions whose adherents "shared, regardless of their views on the existence or nonexistence of a divinity, ... a rationalist approach to fundamental questions of earthly existence—a conviction that the affairs of human beings should be governed not by faith in the supernatural but by a reliance on reason and evidence adduced from the natural world" (Jacoby 4-5). However, although many freethinkers were highly critical of religious doctrine and some of fiercely opposed Christian orthodoxy, they usually shied away from the ultimate act of iconoclasm. This is of a particular significance, since the first generation of American freethinkers during the revolutionary and the founding period of the republic—Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson being the most prominent representatives—played an important part in laying out the coordinates of what would soon develop into the civil religious paradigm. For a discussion of atheism through the lens of "the transnational," Paine is an equally obvious as interesting case, not only because his biography has a transatlantic component.[4] On the one hand, he was one of the most effective propagators of the British brand of Deism in America. Although his radical deconstruction of the alleged veracity of the biblical scriptures and rancorous indictment of institutionalized religion in *The Age of Reason* earned him multiple accusations of being, as Theodore Roosevelt notoriously put it, a "filthy little atheist" (qtd. in Jacoby 107), Paine always insisted on his belief in "one God and no more" (*Complete Writings* 464) and even wrote a pamphlet with the telling title *Atheism Refuted; in a Discourse to Prove the Existence of a God* (1798), in which he stressed his conviction that "God is the power or first cause, nature is the law, and matter is the subject acted upon" (12). In that, his invocation of the boogeyman of atheism is in the service of defending his Deist brand of natural philosophy, which he saw under threat by currents in Enlightenment philosophy that were strongly moving towards a scientific world view that would even exclude the idea of the deist "watchmaker God": "The evil that has resulted from the error of the schools, in teaching natural philosophy as an accomplishment only, has been that of generating in the pupils a species of Atheism. Instead of looking through the works of Creation to the Creator himself, they stop short, and employ the knowledge they acquire to create doubts of his existence" (8).

Like his opus magnum *The Age of Reason*, this little tract was not only a contribution to the debate on natural philosophy but also an argumentative assault

---

4   Since Paine's first emigration to the new world in 1774 precedes the formal foundation of the United States of America, it cannot be aptly called trans*national*.

directed at France, a nation shaken by revolutionary turmoil in which, as Paine notes in the preface of *Atheism Refuted*, "atheistical doctrines… are extending themselves" (4).

Although Paine wrote this indictment before his return to the United States, the text helped to establish the nexus between the idea of the nation and religion. His line of argument—somewhat surprisingly in the light of his rejection of conservative dogmatism—accords with many orthodox religious expressions of the fear of an infiltration of America by French post-revolutionary atheistic radicalism, which was widely considered a major threat to the newly emerged national identity. A short pamphlet by the theologian Leonhard Woods, based on a commencement speech delivered at Harvard in 1799, may serve as a striking example here. He tells his American readers that "[a] LIVELIER picture of the genuine spirit and fruits of atheism can no where be found than in the character and conduct of the FRENCH" (emphases in the original) (11). After an inventory of the atrocities committed during the *Terreur* and a denouncement of the "ridiculous nonsense, that comes from the mouth of those crazy-headed Jacobins" (12), Woods warns his fellow countrymen: "If you will, Oh, Americans, do all this and more.—But if your hearts are not yet hard enough, nor your hands bloody enough to commit such deeds of darkness, then, *call upon the French and they will help you*" (15). That kind of rhetoric, highly popular among late eighteenth-century conservatives, established a clear-cut dichotomy which establishes the atheist as the epitome of the "un-American Other" a—dialectical motion that has been a constant throughout the country's cultural history and that had a significant effect on the atrophic development of atheist thought in the United States.

Ironically, Paine became a victim of this newly emerging paradigm. His fall from grace—once hailed as the embodiment of the American patriot (as the author of *Common Sense*), later (as the author of *The Age of Reason*) a "perfect target for social and religious conservatives as his writings combined associations with religious heresy, economic radicalism, and the French Revolution" (Jacoby 58)—was primarily rooted in a philosophical-theological conflict with the conservatives. From their perspective, Deism, as it is represented by Paine and others,[5] represents

> a drift away from orthodox Christian conceptions of God as an agent
> interacting with humans and intervening in human history; and towards
> God as architect of a universe operating by unchanging laws, which

---

5 Eighteenth-century Deism was evidently not a monolithic doctrine. According to James Turner, it "ranged from the strident anti-clericalism of Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen through the quiet, socially conservative moralism of Franklin and Jefferson until it merged imperceptibly with the vaguely skeptical of Christianity of Washington and the waveringly Deistic speculations of John Adams. Deism reached its zenith in the 1790s, when, as Lyman Beecher remembered, farm boys 'read Tom Paine and believed him' and Yale students 'called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc. etc.' Enthusiasm for French radicalism even encouraged some feeble efforts to institutionalize Paine's variety of Deism. But the result never amounted to much" (52-53).

> humans have to conform to or suffer the consequences. In wider perspective, this can be seen as a move along a continuum from a view of the supreme being with powers analogous to what we know as agency and personality, and exercising them continually in relation to us, to a view of this being as related to us only through the law-governed structure he has created, and ending with a view of our condition as at grips with an indifferent universe, with God either indifferent or non-existent. From this perspective, Deism can be seen as a half-way house on the road to contemporary atheism. (Taylor 270)

American culture, cumbered by the yoke of the religion-identity nexus, has however never gone down that road all the way. In the intellectual history of the United States, the tradition of positive atheism in the sense of an affirmative claim of the non-existence of deities is rather weak when compared to Europe. This does, however, not mean that the U.S. remained untouched by the positive or strong variety of atheism but it is telling that its manifestations have strikingly often a transnational trajectory.

The Transnational Trajectories of Radical Unbelief

In the light of the religious grammar of the American social imaginary, it is not surprising that the first manifestations of strong or positive atheism did not emerge out of a domestic intellectual tradition but as the result of the appropriation and reworking of European ideas in a process that we could, borrowing a term from Shelley Fisher Fishkin, label as transnational "cross-fertilization" (37), a form of reciprocal interaction of discourses and texts from both sides of the Atlantic.

This first exemplary case to prove this is that of the women's rights activist, abolitionist and freethinker Ernestine L. Rose (1810-1892), whose personal as well as intellectual biography reads like the embodiment of "the transnational." Born into a Jewish family as Potowska in Piotrków Trybunalski (Poland) in 1810, Rose fled her home country at an early age to live in Germany[6] and later in England—where she came into contact with Robert Owen's utopian socialist ideas—and finally came to the United States in 1836 where she became one of the most prominent abolitionist and feminist activists of her time. Rose's biography is in several ways of great significance for a discussion of the transnational element in American atheism. As Jacoby notes, "the combination of Rose's atheism, her Jewishness, and the early timing of her immigration" gave her a status of a "threefold 'outsiderness'" (101).[7] It is

---

6   In her introduction to Roses speeches and letters, Paula Doress-Worters speculates that Rose could have attended the progressive salons of Rahel Varnhagen and Dorothea Schlegel (cf. Doress-Worters in Rose 4).

7   Jacoby points out that "early-nineteenth-century American Jews were rightly convinced that the legal equality granted by the Constitution… offered them a freedom from persecution and a degree of personal liberty only dreamed of by most of their European contemporaries" (101). While this is undoubtedly true on the level of institutionalized

important to note that Rose was not an outspoken atheist from the outset. Although she quickly developed an inner autonomy from the religious element of her Jewish heritage and had embraced the Owenite rejection of organized religion, she was basically a freethinker in the Paineian tradition throughout the first part of her career as activist and public speaker. On April 10, 1861, she finally "comes out proudly as an atheist" (Doress-Worters in Rose 295) in a speech entitled "A Defence of Atheism."[8] Here she shows herself aware of the taboo she is touching upon as the "inquiry of the existence of a God, … produces in most minds a feeling of awe, as if stepping on forbidden ground, too holy and sacred for mortals to approach" (295). Rose ventures into this prohibited territory, following the path paved by Enlightenment natural philosophy, by promoting the explanatory powers of geology, natural history, physiology, mathematics, chemistry and astronomy (cf. 296-297).

Rose's initially Deistic worldview had, by the time she gave this seminal lecture, matured towards a purely scientific cosmology that rejects the Deistic assumption according to which the "watchmaker God" manifests itself in the law of nature. She had outgrown her idol Paine by affirmatively rendering *any* notion of a deity a man-made fiction:

> Ascend into the heavens, and enter the 'milky way,' go from planet to planet to the remotest star, and ask the eternally revolving systems, Where is God? and Echo answers. Where? The Universe of Matter gives us no record of his existence. Where next shall we search? Enter the Universe of Mind, read the millions of volumes written on the subject, and in all the speculations, the assertions, the assumptions, the theories, and the creeds, you can only find Man stamped in an indelible impress his own mind on every page. In describing his God, he delineated his own character: the picture he drew represents in living and ineffaceable colors the epoch of his existence—the period he lived in. (297)

By dethroning God from his transcendental position and by relocating this "supreme being" in the sphere of immanence, specifically in history and culture, Rose's philosophy went far beyond the American freethought tradition's project of scrutinizing the truthfulness and proving the historicity of the holy scriptures. It rather shows a close kinship with Ludwig Feuerbach's notion of God as an anthropomorphic projection, according to which "God did not, as the Bible says, make man in His image; on the contrary man… made God in his image" (Feuerbach 187).

The biography of Emma Goldman (1869-1940) bears some notable resemblances to that of Rose one generation earlier with regard to their transnational

---

politics, Jacoby stresses that on the socio-cultural level "Jews had, since American Enlightenment-bashing began in the 1790s, often been lumped with other religious 'infidels' as well as with the French revolutionary brand of atheism" (101).

8   This talk held in Boston is—according the current state of my research—the earliest outspoken manifestation of positive atheism in the public discourse of the United States.

itinerary—not only geographical, but also intellectual. Also born into an Eastern European Jewish background, Goldman—"an outspoken atheist and feminist as well as an anarchist who would come to occupy a unique position in the history of both American political radicalism and secularism" (Jacoby 234)—left her native Imperial Russia to migrate to the United States in 1885. Unlike in the case of Rose, Goldman's fame and notoriety outlasted her lifetime, and she continued to be a point of reference for both activists and scholars.[9] She is also indispensable for a transnational discussion of atheism as "[h]er love for 'the other America' nurtured in a prison library on Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, enabled her to bridge the gap… between the native American individualist and rationalist traditions and the European radical sentiment so alien to mainstream American sensibilities" (Jacoby 234). For her as an activist, philosophy was always a practical tool in her political struggles. Her points of reference were, not least because of the lack of American equivalents, the most uncompromising voices of European "positive" atheism of her time: Karl Marx, Mikhail Bakunin, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Goldman's attack on the idea of the existence of a god and on the religious fabric of the American social imaginary has to be read in the context of what she considered a multilayered pan-revolutionary project that would liberate the working classes, women, people of color and other disenfranchised segments of the United States' population alike: "Whoever sincerely aims at a radical change in society, whoever strives to free humanity from the scourge of dependence and misery, must turn his back on Christianity, on the old as well as the present form of the same" (Goldman 234). The Puritan heritage of American culture was consequently one of the main targets of her polemic indictments. Against the backdrop of her transatlantic experience, she bemoans the sanctimony of "America, the stronghold of the Puritanic eunuchs" where "the only day of recreation left to the masses, Sunday, has been made hideous and utterly impossible" because, for the lower classes, "the sociability and fun of European outdoor life is... exchanged for the gloom of the church, the stuffy, germ-saturated country parlor, or the brutalizing atmosphere of the back-room saloon" (156-157).

Goldman's ideological counter-agent against this oppressive and alienating tradition is what she calls a "philosophy of atheism" that rejects the "God idea" as "a sort of spiritualistic stimulus to satisfy the fads and fancies of every shade of human weakness" (241) and conceives of a notion of atheism that should serve as a viable base of fundamental empowerment on both the individual as well as the

---

9   Over the past decades, a substantial number of biographies have appeared on her life: Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman* (1961); Alix Kates Shulman, *To the Barricades: The Anarchist Life of Emma Goldman* (1971); Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life* (1984); Martha Solomon, *Emma Goldman* (1987); Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman. A Biography* (1990); John Chalberg, *Emma Goldman: American Individualist* (1991); Theresa Moritz, *The World's Most Dangerous Woman: A New Biography of Emma Goldman* (2001).

collective level: "The philosophy of Atheism represents a concept of life without any metaphysical Beyond or Divine Regulator. It is the concept of an actual, real world with its liberating, expanding and beautifying possibilities, as against an unreal world, which, with its spirits, oracles, and mean contentment has kept humanity in helpless degradation" (246).

During the First Red Scare of the early 1920s, Goldman's blending of anarchism, atheism, and feminism (as well as her at times militant activism) triggered the established reflex of fear of ideological contagion with foreign ideas threatening to the American social imaginary. Along with many other foreign-born alleged radicals, Goldman was deported from the United States.
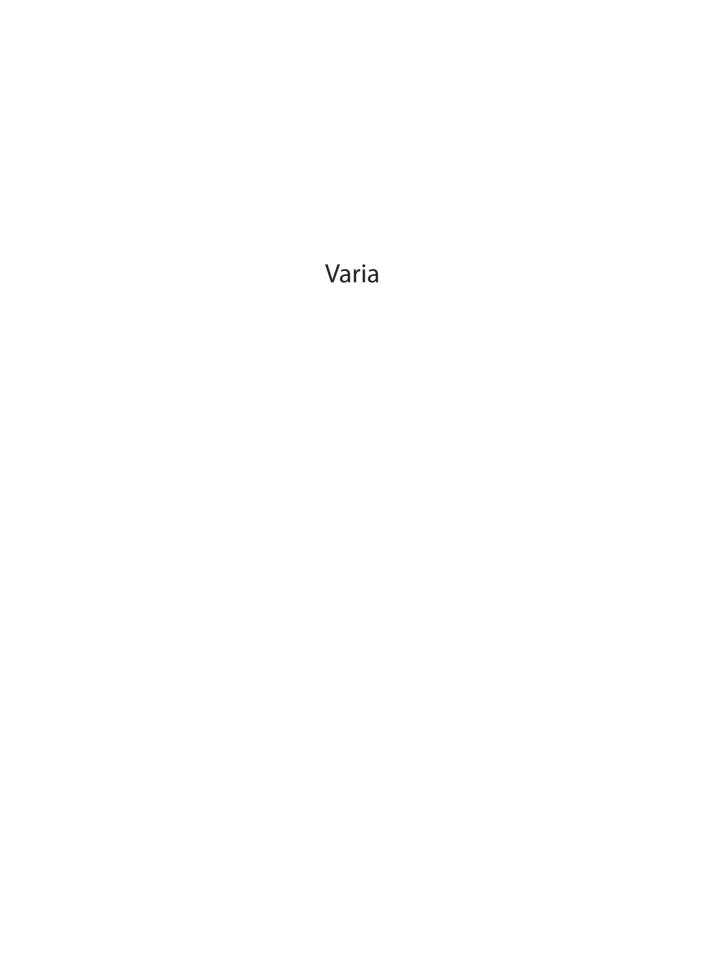
As we have seen, the term "the transnational" carries two meanings with regards to the question of atheism in American culture: it denotes a methodological perspective as well as a socio-cultural reality. The former aspect allows us to retrace the emergence of a paradigm that—in different historic variations and figurations—has become (and still is) a supporting pillar of the narrative of U.S. culture and to analyze the enduring significance of religious semantics for the hegemonic narratives of American identity. But is also helps us to understand why almost all manifestations of atheist thinking are a product transnational reciprocities, especially with regard to the affirmative variety of atheism, a philosophical position that is clearly underdeveloped in American culture. The transatlantic and transcultural biographies of Goldman and Rose are exemplary cases for this transfer of ideas but also the reaction of dominant American culture to it. As advocates the 'Death of God' they have been "othered" and marginalized in several ways: as women, as feminists, as former European citizens, as Jews, as political radicals, and as non-believers. Although the limited scope of this essay does not allow for an inquiry into further manifestations of transnational atheism—one could continue this genealogy to the so-called "New Atheists" such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens—the benefits of a transnational approach become evident: It contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics that are the reason for the fact that the United States still lacks a full-fledged *cultural* secularization that many European societies already have undergone throughout the twentieth century.

Works Cited

Bellah Robert N. "Civil Religion in America." *American Civil Religion.* Ed. Donald G. Jones and Russel E. Richey. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1990. 21-44. Print.

Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975. Print.

Bullivant, Stephen. "Defining Atheism." *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism.* Ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 11-21. Print.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. *The Imaginary Institution of Society.* Transl. Kathleen Blamey. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987. Print.

Chesterton, Gilbert Keith. *What I Saw in America*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1922. Print.

Edgell, Penny, et al. "Atheists as 'Other': Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership in American Society." *American Sociological Review* 71 (2006): 211-234. Print.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. *Lectures of the Essence of Religion*. Transl. Ralph Manheim. New York: Harper & Row, 1967. Print.

Fisher Fishkin, Shelley. "Mapping Transnational American Studies." *Transnational American Studies*. Ed. Udo J. Hebel. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012. 31-74. Print.

Goldman, Emma. *Red Emma Speaks. An Emma Goldman Reader.* Ed. Alix Kates Shuman. Amherst, NY: Humanities Books, 1998.

Gorski, Philip S. "Civil Religion Today (ARDA Guiding Paper Series)." The Association of Religion Data Archives at The Pennsylvania State University. Web. 15 June 2017. www.thearda.com/rrh/papers/guidingpapers/Gorski.pdf.

Haught, James A. *2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1996. Print.

Jacoby, Susan. *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004. Print.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Letter to the Danbury Baptists." The Library of Congress. Web. 25 May 2017. www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html.

Nabokov, Vladimir. "On a Book entitled *Lolita.*" *Lolita*. Penguin, 2000. 311-317. Print.

Paine, Thomas. *Atheism Refuted; In a Discourse to Prove the Existence of a God*. London: J. Hohnson, 1798. Print.

——. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*. Ed. Philip S. Foner, vol. 1. New York: The Citadel Press, 1945. Print.

Pease, Donald E. "Introduction: Re-mapping the Transnational Turn." *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies.* Ed. Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease and Carlos Rowe. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2011. 1-46. Print.

Rose, Ernestine Louise. *Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine Rose, Early Women's Rights Leader.* Ed. Paula Doress-Worters. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2008. Print.

Smith, Horace. *The Tin Trumpet, or Heads and Tales, for the Wise and Waggish.* London: Whittaker & Co, 1836. Print.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007. Print.

Turner, James. *Without God, Without Creed. The Origins of Unbelief in America,* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. Print.

Woods, Leonhard. *A Contrast Between the Effects of Religion, and the Effects of Atheism: An Oration, Delivered at Commencement, Harvard University.* Boston: John Russel, 1799. Print.

Varia

Karolina Korycka

Louisa May Alcott's
"Behind a Mask, or a Woman's Power":
The Woman as an Actress, Femininity as a Mask

Abstract: This essay discusses the ways in which Louisa May Alcott's 1866 novella "Behind a Mask, or a Woman's Power" expresses the author's frustration with her familial, social, and cultural reality. It explains the numerous feminist implications of the Gothic tale, in which Alcott, more or less directly, tackles the issue of female labor in post Civil War America, mocks the basic assumptions of the sentimental revolution and challenges contemporary notions regarding femininity.

Keywords: Louisa May Alcott, Gothic, femme fatale, femininity, masquerade, True Womanhood, sentimentalism, Transcendentalism

For about a century after the publication of *Little Women* in 1868, nineteenth-century New England writer Louisa May Alcott was seen primarily as an author of children's fiction and was most readily associated with her famous novel for girls. However, Madeleine Stern's discovery of Alcott's sensational stories—published anonymously or under the pseudonym A. M. Barnard in the 1860s—and the subsequent publication of these stories by Stern in the 1970s led to a sudden increase in academic interest in the author. Literary critics began to question Alcott's reputation as the Children's Friend and the degree to which she truly subscribed to the values she preached in her domestic fiction. Some have dismissed these so-called thrillers as pot-boilers: a reasonable conclusion considering the difficult financial situation of the Alcott family and the fact that Alcott herself had referred to them as "rubbishy tales," which she wrote because they "paid best" and took little time to write (qtd. in Cheney 165). However, many, including Judith Fetterley and Karen Halttunen, have come to believe that by writing sentimental fiction Alcott was merely "assuming a mask of propriety" (Halttunen 242), while her Gothic stories permitted sincere self-expression, which she had to sacrifice after the success of *Little Women*. In a similar vein, Eugenia Kaledin writes that Alcott's "willingness to buy success by catering to middle class ideals aborted the promise of her art and led her to betray her most deeply felt values" (251). These critics have been inclined to see Alcott's sensational fiction as an outlet for her bottled up anger and repressed sexuality, as well as an expression of her feminism. Not only did anonymous publication allow Alcott to

explore more sinister themes—including mind control, drug use, murder, and madness—but it also provided her with the opportunity to confront and comment on her familial, social, and cultural reality more openly and, hence, more critically.

Of all her Gothic tales, Louisa May Alcott's 1866 novella "Behind a Mask, or a Woman's Power" provides perhaps the most personal critique of the society she lived in and the ideologies that governed it: especially those pertaining to women. The protagonist, Jean Muir, is a divorced thirty-year-old woman with an implied alcohol addiction; significantly, she is also a former actress. In a desperate, yet carefully planned attempt to gain both title and wealth, she disguises herself as a nineteen-year-old governess and enters the lives of the prosperous Coventries. She gradually gains the trust of the family, which includes Mrs. Coventry, her two sons: Edward and Gerald, her daughter: sixteen-year-old Bella, and Lucia, their cousin, to whom Gerald is betrothed. Although Lucia never learns to like Jean, the governess, nonetheless, succeeds in fooling all of the remaining members of the household. She seduces both brothers, but finally marries her initial target: their wealthy elderly uncle—Mr. Coventry. The marriage takes place in the last possible moment, just as the family discovers the truth about Jean Muir. The story is fascinating primarily due to its scheming protagonist, whom the reader, though it may come as a surprise, quickly learns to sympathize with. Instead of condemning the heroine for her often unethical behavior, the reader is likely to admire her ability to overcome any obstacles that might stand in her way.

In many ways, the story expresses Louisa May Alcott's frustration with the situation of women in nineteenth-century America: Jean's fictional experiences are not entirely disconnected from their day to day struggles. Having a governess as a main character allows Alcott to shed light on the working conditions of female domestic servants and to reveal the abuse they often had to suffer at the hands of their employers. Also, through Jean's marriage at the end of the story, based on falsehoods and manipulation, presented as the character's only way out of her difficult financial situation, as a matter of necessity rather than of love, Alcott challenges sentimental cliches regarding courtship and questions the possibility of a truly happy marriage. It is no coincidence that Jean is a talented actress, not only in a professional sense, but also in her everyday life and in her relationships with others. Louisa May Alcott makes it clear that this ability to act is crucial to the protagonist's ultimate success. The ease with which the ruthless Jean Muir—motivated by greed, ambition and vengeance—can *act* according to social codes which she does not respect and *play the role* of a submissive Victorian woman, a role expected of her by society, is telling. By presenting certain sets of behavior merely as performances, as roles women must play in order to persevere in a hostile environment, Alcott challenges socially imposed norms and contemporary notions regarding femininity. Overall, the Gothic tale offers much insight into the mind of its author—an extraordinarily perceptive nineteenth-century woman—and her thoughts on the oppressive ideas and ideologies that reigned during her lifetime.

Working Women

There is a significant autobiographical element in Louisa May Alcott's "Behind a Mask" for, like the governess Jean Muir, Alcott had her own experiences working as a domestic servant, which undoubtedly influenced her unfavorable portrayal of the Coventry family and her descriptions of the relationship between Jean and her employers. At age eighteen, Louisa May Alcott began working for Reverend James Richardson, encouraged by his reassurances that her responsibilities would be limited to "light housework and attending to his sickly sister, Eliza" (Maibor, "Upstairs, Downstairs" 67). It did not take long for young Louisa to realize that her life in the Richardson household would be far from what she had originally imagined: the ordeal affected her so deeply that she wrote a story about it twenty-three years later. "How I Went Out of Service," written in 1874, describes Louisa's brief, seven-week experience as a domestic servant, which included "overwork, isolation, sexual advances from her employer, and a loss of self-possession" (Maibor, "Upstairs, Downstairs" 67). One can safely assume that this period of Alcott's life inspired, albeit in different ways, not only the story "How I Went Out of Service," but also her novella "Behind a Mask: or, A Woman's Power."

The employers featured in these stories fail to inspire much sympathy. Like James Richardson, the Coventry family displays behavior indicative of a strong sense of superiority: they are self-absorbed, rude, and disrespectful. Alcott portrays both Reverend Richardson and Mrs. Coventry as self-appointed martyrs, who are childlike in their need for attention and care. The Coventry family's conversation prior to Jean's arrival testifies to their incredible prejudice. Mrs. Coventry declares that she "dreads the coming of a stranger" and claims that only for her daughter has she "nerved herself to endure this woman" (4). Gerald, the indolent heir of the Coventry estate, speaks of his "inveterate aversion to the whole tribe," meaning governesses, and forgets to send a carriage for Jean to the station (3). Even Edward and Bella, the more sympathetic members of the family, speak of the new governess in a condescending, patronizing tone, referring to her as "poor little Muir" (4).

Once Jean shows up, she overhears Lucia and Gerald gossiping about her in a scene reminiscent of the one in *Jane Eyre*, during which Jane overhears Rochester's guests speaking ill of governesses. Jane must silently bear the slander directed at women such as herself because she is, like Louisa May Alcott and Jean Muir, a victim of class distinctions that posit all of these women as inferior beings undeserving of respect. The attitude of their "superiors" is emblematic of nineteenth-century mentality regarding domestic servants, whose status was often reduced to that of objects.

In "How I Went Out of Service," Alcott provides an interesting description of how she was treated during her visits to her employer's study upon his cordial invitation. The passage exhibits Richardson's vain conviction that his company could contribute to the cultural elevation of his servant:

> I was not to read; but to be read to. I was not to enjoy the flowers,
> pictures, fire, and books; but to keep them in order for my lord to enjoy.
> I was also to be a passive bucket, into which he was to pour all manner
> of philosophic, metaphysical, and sentimental rubbish. I was to serve his
> needs, soothe his sufferings, and sympathize with all his sorrows–be a
> galley slave, in fact. (358)

By treating her as an object at his disposal, Richardson demonstrates his disregard for
young Alcott's status as subject. In a similar manner, Jean is denied her individuality
and talked about in terms of her belonging to a lower class of people: governesses.

Both narratives express an understandable rage resulting from humiliation.
Louisa May Alcott claims to have lost much of her respect for mankind as a result
of her brief employment at the Richardson household. Insult was added to injury
when she discovered that her hard work was rewarded with the appalling sum of four
dollars: "I have had a good many bitter minutes in my life; but one of the bitterest
came to me as I stood there in the windy road, with the sixpenny pocket-book open
before me, and looked from my poor chapped, grimy, chill-blained hands to the
paltry sum that was considered reward enough for all the hard and humble labor they
had done" (363). Her subsequent anger, although justified, has to be contained and
the only way for Alcott to save what remains of her honor is to send the money back.
Clearly, the disappointment and anger which remained within Louisa as a residue of
this traumatic period were channeled into "Behind a Mask." Furthermore, the novella
was written in 1866, soon after Alcott's return from a year long stay in Europe, where
she had taken care of "a fretful invalid," Anna Weld (Saxton 285). Her time spent with
this woman seems to have amplified the already existing sense of indignation she felt
regarding the way domestic servants were treated. Moreover, upon arrival, Alcott
had to return to the difficult financial reality of her family life and the responsibilities
that this reality entailed: her family members depended on her to support them. All
of these emotions—rage, frustration, anxiety—found expression in the novella she
proceeded to author.

Alcott's anger is embodied in the character of Jean Muir. The heroine quickly
"reveals that she is disgusted by the Coventry family's superior attitude towards her"
and resents "being discriminated against on the grounds of her class" (Mulatu 21).
Their preoccupation with class distinctions is further emphasized when Jean lies
about her background and tells Mr. Coventry that she is the daughter of Lady Howard,
a "lady of rank," whom Jean's father actually married after Jean's mother's death. In
a letter to a friend, Jean writes that "it worked like a charm; he told Monsieur, and
both felt the most chivalrous compassion for Lady Howard's daughter, though before
they had secretly looked down on me, and my real poverty and my lowliness" (100).
The reader, who learns about Jean's contempt for her employers early on in the story,
cannot help but sympathize with her dislike for them.

Jean Muir's and Louisa May Alcott's experiences with domestic service seem

all the more infuriating when one considers the larger question of female labor in the nineteenth century. Due to her father's infamous inability to earn money, Louisa May Alcott and the women in her family had to learn how to work beyond the home in order to support themselves. The experiences she gathered while in domestic service, as a teacher, an author, and a seamstress, led to the painful realization of the uncomfortable position of women in society trying to make a living. In "How I Went Out of Service," Alcott specifically writes about the few options available to women as having serious drawbacks: acting was seen as an occupation not meant for proper women, sewing was low-paid and detrimental to health, domestic service was degrading, and there was teaching, which Alcott simply did not enjoy. Hence, "frustration over women's limited opportunities for employment" is apparent in most of Alcott's fiction (Maibor, "Upstairs, Downstairs" 67).

After the Civil War, tension arose as women began to realize their worth. Carolyn R. Maibor claims that "while their experience during the war showed women, including Alcott, the depth of their capabilities as well as the enormous benefits of a variety of vocations, mainstream society worked actively to suppress women's desires for continued and increased access to the professions" (*Labor Pains* 108). Because among the few jobs women could perform none were particularly appealing, women had to learn to cope with the sense of entrapment caused by their restrictive reality. These problems lurk in the background of "Behind a Mask," which, according to Judith Fetterley, "presents an incisive analysis of the economic situation of the white middle-class woman in late nineteenth century society" ("Impersonating 'Little Women'" 2). In this sense, Jean Muir is not unlike other femme fatales, who, according to Jennifer Hedgecock, expose "the exploitative and oppressive nature of the hegemonic power structure that limits economic and social opportunities for women" (28). Taking into consideration such an oppressive reality, the reader cannot blame Jean Muir for using any tools available in order to improve her life as much as it is possible. Although she is ruthless in conquering the obstacles that stand in her way, one cannot help but empathize with her struggle.

Louisa May Alcott on Marriage

Jean's ultimate goal is to marry Mr. Coventry, but romantic feelings play no part in her desire to become his wife: his wealth and the promise of financial stability should she become Mrs. Coventry are the only things that interest her. As is the case with other femme fatales, her "true goal" is "the pursuit of upward social mobility" (Hedgecock 22). The union between the rich Mr. Coventry and the beautiful, charming Jean, whose attention appeals to the former's vanity, may reflect Alcott's cynical approach towards the institution of marriage and the sentimental cliches associated with it.

Born in 1832, Alcott was deeply affected by the sentimental revolution of the early nineteenth century, which led to the emergence of a new family model, which "was to serve as a moral counterweight to a restless, materialistic, individualistic, and

egalitarian society" (Strickland 5). Charles Strickland describes the literature of the time, which:

> reinforced a series of cults, all interrelated and all dealing with aspects of marriage and family life. The cult of romantic love dealt with the formation of families, and specifically with the rituals of courtship and marriage. The cult of domesticity was a way of marking boundaries between the nuclear family and the world outside it. Finally, the interrelated cults of motherhood and childhood specified the central purpose of family life and the place women were to occupy within it. Together these sentimental cults provided the cultural context within which Alcott came of age and the literary heritage with which she had to come to terms in working out her own views of family life. (6)

Louisa May Alcott had to confront dominant ideological notions concerning the role of family, as well as the place of the woman within society, and either adhere to them or reject them. Hence, while her books for children apparently glorify home and emphasize the moral power of the institution of family, her sensational stories present the potential danger of robbing women of any power outside of the domestic sphere. In "Behind a Mask," Alcott seems to be responding to the sentimental fiction of the time, which constantly emphasized the importance of love, while in reality marriage was the only reasonable option from a purely economic standpoint for most nineteenth-century women.

Even Alcott's *Little Women* reveals conflicting emotions concerning marriage. Mrs. March idealizes it and claims that "to be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman; and I sincerely hope my girls may know this beautiful experience" (105), which Judith Fetterley comments upon by stating that "she might as well have said it is the only thing that can happen. There are no other viable options" ("Alcott's Civil War" 376). At a different point in the novel, Meg expresses a view much closer to Fetterley's than her mother's: "men have to work, and women to marry for money. It's a dreadfully unjust world" (168) and the author herself seems to be in much greater accordance with Meg than Mrs. March. Eventually, even Mrs. March admits to being "angry nearly every day of [her] life" (85), implying that perhaps, despite her husbands efforts to help her, marital bliss isn't all that she had imagined it would be. Agnieszka Soltysik makes a valid point that Marmee's method of coping with anger—tightening her lips and leaving the room—could be interpreted in terms of the pressure placed on women to remain "passive and unthreatening," if they want "to survive in a social order that strictly regulates both female speech and sexuality" (89). Instead of bringing joy and having a liberating effect, marriage is presented as a form of entrapment.

It is noteworthy that Abba May Alcott, Louisa's mother and the inspiration for Marmee, did not have a carefree, joyful marriage. She could not rely on her husband financially and often found herself submitting to his eccentric ideas. In 1850, one of

Louisa's journal entries contains the following line: "I often think what a hard life she has had since she married,—so full of wandering and all sorts of worry" (qtd. in Cheney 62). At another time, while describing *Moods*, Alcott writes that the novel "was meant to show a life affected by moods, not a discussion of marriage which I know little about, except observing that very few were happy ones" (qtd. in Seelye 149). All this leads back to the divorced Jean Muir, who is also, in all likelihood, a victim of an unhappy union.

Jean Muir's troubled past, though never truly revealed, is alluded to multiple times throughout the novella. At the very beginning of the story, soon after she first meets the Coventry family, the reader discovers her dark secret: she is not a meek, innocent governess, but an angry woman with a plan. Yet as she takes off her disguise, we learn that some tragic secret haunts her past: "she had been lovely once, happy, innocent, and tender; but nothing of all this remained to the gloomy woman who leaned there brooding over some wrong, or loss, or disappointment which her darkened all her life" (12). Later, in a letter to a friend, she writes that she was once "lovely and young, good and gay" (99), not the bitter, vengeful woman she is now. These allusions are sufficient to classify "Behind a Mask" as an example of the literature of misery: a literary art form "produced mainly by women who felt to the depths of their being their painful powerlessness and their exclusion from a male-dominated society" (Reynolds 395). David S. Reynolds, the author of *Beneath the American Renaissance*, describes Jean as a "wronged woman who has been severely wounded in love" and "takes vengeance against men by attracting them with her sweet, docile appearance, scheming all the while to take advantage of them" (408). The reader realizes how desperate Jean is to succeed when she declares that she will "end all at once" if her plan fails (77). Because suicide is preferable to returning to her "old life," one can only imagine the devastating financial and mental state she is in.

Jean as Performer, Witch and Mesmerist

Despite all these hardships—limited access to employment, difficult working conditions, oppressive class distinctions, demeaning social norms, a past unhappy marriage—Jean Muir refuses to be discouraged. She learns to mask her anger, frustration, and disappointment. She is acutely aware of what is expected of her, but instead of submitting to social norms, she *performs* such submission.

Jean's punctuality makes the initial good impression as she enters the stage. She gains favor with her polite manner and at once proceeds to enchant the family with her many talents, which include playing the piano and singing: "Miss Muir played like one who loved music and was perfect mistress of her art. She charmed them all by the magic of this spell; even indolent Gerald sat up to listen, and Lucia put down her needle, while Ned watched the slender white fingers as they flew, and wondered at the strength and skill which they possessed" (6). When asked to sing, the new governess brings some of the family members to tears. She then impresses Mrs.

Coventry with her ability to prepare perfect tea. The family appreciates her modesty and apparent reluctance to gossip about her previous employers. They later discover that another one of Jean's abilities is arranging beautiful bouquets, which she agrees to prepare for Mrs. Coventry every day.

Jean quickly proves a delightful addition to their household, enchanting with her numerous graces. In addition to these simple charms, she uses every possible opportunity to put her acting skills to test and performs a series of scenes for the family. On her first night, she pretends to have fainted and calls out to her dead mother for help while in a supposed daze, winning the pity of most, if not all, of those present. Judith Fetterley writes that "the Alcott who created 'Marmee' knew what she was doing; here she identifies the idea of mother as one of the great sentimental cliches of her culture, capable of being used for considerable theatrical effect" ("Impersonating 'Little Women'" 8). Because Jean's treacherous use of this cliche proves effective, Alcott makes a mockery of the same sentimental ideas that she herself uses in her domestic fiction.

Many of Jean's miniature performances are prepared for specific male members of the family. During her first encounter with Mr. Coventry, she acts as if she did not know with whom she was speaking and, by feigning ignorance, flatters him immensely without seeming obtrusive. On another occasion, when she is alone and aware of the fact that she is being watched, Jean begins to weep, adding to her mysterious aura and inspiring the compassion of the man she wishes to marry. At a crucial moment, Jean confesses her alleged love for Mr. Coventry by kissing his portrait, when she is sure he can see her and equally sure that he does not know that she knows it. It is this gesture that seals her fate, for now the old gentleman is convinced of her love and offers to marry her. In each of these cases, Jean transcends boundaries. Her performances entertain the audience that does not realize it is being deceived: they believe that they have access to her mystery, but, in reality, they only see and know what she wants them to.

Because Jean realizes that she is under constant scrutiny, she is careful to heed even minor details. The former actress skillfully uses her surroundings and her own body to frame femininity itself:

> Miss Muir sat in the recess of a deep window, in a low lounging chair, working at an embroidery frame with a graceful industry pleasant to see. Of late she had worn colors, for Bella had been generous in gifts, and the pale blue muslin which flowed in soft waves about her was very becoming to her fair skin and golden hair. The close braids were gone, and loose curls dropped here and there from the heavy coil wound around her well-shaped head. The tip of one dainty foot was visible, and a petulant little gesture now and then shook back the falling sleeve gave glimpses of a round white arm.... she made a charming picture of all that is most womanly and winning; a picture which few men's eyes would not have like to rest upon. (71)

This ethereal image of the gentle maiden busy with her sweet domestic duty is one Jean Muir obviously creates consciously. As she subtly tries to draw Gerald's attention to herself, Jean makes herself the object of male desire and of the male gaze.

The male gaze is also referred to briefly in Alcott's 1874 story. During her time spent working for Richardson, Louisa May Alcott falls prey to the controlling gaze of her male employer and she feels intimidated when she catches him observing her silently as she cleans his study. He asks her not to leave and his address to her reveals the nature of the pleasure he derives from looking at her: "It pleases me to see you here and lends a sweet, domestic charm to my solitary room. I like that graceful cap, that housewifely apron, and I beg you to wear them often; for it refreshes my eye to see something tasteful, young, and womanly about me" (357). This short passage exposes the many layers of oppression female domestic servants had to face. Their jobs were made unbearable by the knowledge that their lower social status also made them vulnerable to various forms of sexual prejudice and advances. The objectifying gaze turns the woman servant into a reflection of the male employer's desires, which are largely based on the patriarchal placement of the woman in the private domestic sphere, where she happily performs the duties destined for her.

It is telling that when Alcott rebels against his incessant harassment and declares that she had been hired to be his sister's companion, not his, Richardson punishes her by simultaneously humiliating her both as a servant and as a woman. Of the many chores suddenly added to her workload the most striking is that of boot-blacking, which is "considered humiliating work for a woman," although Alcott admits she fails to understand why it is so (360). The teenaged Louisa's rejection of male authority, her refusal to play the role of the "passive bucket," and her "declaration of independence," as she calls her rebellious speech directed at Richardson, allow her to reclaim her subjectivity and individuality; however, in the process she acts against the feminine ideal of submission and, as punishment, her femininity itself is attacked. By saying "far be it from me to accuse one of the nobler sex of spite or the small revenge on underhand annoyance and slights to one who could not escape and would not retaliate" (360), Alcott sarcastically suggests exactly the contrary: she does accuse "the nobler sex" and implies that it is not uncommon for male employers to abuse their power over their helpless female employees.

Jean Muir, aware of the hopelessness of outright rebellion, attacks the system from within. The daring heroine does so by transitioning from the traditional passive role of woman-object-servant to the subversive active role of actress-director. While the young Louisa May Alcott is the passive victim of a controlling male gaze, who is punished for her rebellion against this state of affairs, Jean is the active creator of the image which she allows others to see. She is acutely aware of her surroundings and of what is expected of her by society and various individuals. Every word she utters and every posture she assumes is carefully thought out, as if scripted. The former actress takes into consideration scenery, posture, light, color, textures, props: anything that will make the picture attract the gaze and leave the viewer with a sense of pleasure

from looking at what he believes to be the natural representation of feminine charm.

Jean cunningly stages her audience's desires while they remain oblivious to the fact that everything that they see is a performance. In her relationship with Gerald, for example, the devious governess wears the mask of true womanhood. She lures him by simultaneously avoiding him, thereby awakening his curiosity, and offering him brief glimpses at her enticing femininity. When he asks her whether she considers him the master of the estate, she replies that she does with "a sweet, submissive intonation which made [her response] expressive of the respect, regard, and confidence which men find pleasantest when women feel and show it" (44). When Gerald is wounded by his brother in a jealous rage, Jean contributes to his recovery by proving herself a gifted nurse and by soothing him with her singing, her touch, and her overall presence: the scene alludes to the sentimental glorification of the woman's natural predisposition for caring for others and her miraculous healing abilities. Here and throughout the novella, Jean enacts "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity": the cardinal virtues of True Womanhood (Welter 152).

The irony lies in the fact that while this villainous heroine, like many other female characters in Alcott's sensational writing, "use[s] [her] dramatic skills to fulfill [her] selfish ambitions in flagrant defiance of the cult of domesticity," she demonstrates a perfect awareness of its basic assumptions, which she can then use in her rebellion (Halttunen 240). Perhaps Jean has learned from her Gothic literary sisters that the only accessible forms of escape from oppressive patriarchal structures are madness or death and so, in order to avoid this fate, she must learn to cope within and rebel against these very structures by hiding behind a mask. Jean Muir "poses as the Conventional moral exemplar" (Reynolds 408) and easily convinces most of the members of the Coventry family of her innocence, modesty, and morality. For her, "conventional values are mere cloaks worn to manipulate others" (Reynolds 408). According to John Seelye, "in Jean Muir Alcott seems to be putting the vampirelike Bertha into a Jane Eyre outfit" (158): one cannot help but admire how gracefully she slips into her costume. In the end, her theatrical abilities and "her uncanny use of mock virtue" prove so effective that they "[enable] her to become the wealthy Lady Coventry" (Reynolds 409). The reader is amazed by Jean's ability to deliver a convincing performance despite not identifying with the character she plays in any way.

There is something unsettling about Jean's unbelievably convincing performance. According to Agnieszka Soltysik, it "borders on the supernatural" (102). On her first night at the Coventry home, after she has made a good first impression on the family, Jean retreats to her room, where she takes off her disguise, revealing to the reader that she is not who she seems:

> Still sitting on the floor she unbound and removed the long abundant braids from her head, wiped the pink from her face, took out several pearly teeth, and slipping off her dress appeared herself indeed, a

haggard, worn, and moody woman of thirty at least. The metamorphosis
was wonderful, but the disguise was more in the expression she assumed
than in any art of costume or false adornment. (11)

This description reinforces her supernatural, witch-like quality: the ease with which
she transforms her body, face, expression, and behavior testifies to the extent of
her self-control, which, in Soltysik's words, "exceeds the realistically credible," for
Jean "masters all her bodily symptoms of fear, anxiety, and especially desire" (101).
References to witches do appear throughout the story: Gerald calls Jean "the Scotch
witch" (28) and Jean herself writes about "bewitching" Gerald in a letter to a friend
(99). When Edward discovers her secret and is prepared to announce it to his family,
he says "she has the art of a devil" (97). John Seelye draws a parallel between Jean
Muir and other deceptive female characters: Lady Geraldine from Samuel Taylor
Coleridge's "Christabel," a supernatural creature disguised as someone she is not, and
Duessa from Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queen" (156).

Another interesting comparison is the one Theresa Strough Gaul draws
between Jean's ability to influence those around her and mesmerism, which was
popular in Alcott's time. Although "Jean is never identified as a mesmerist, nor is
mesmerism ever explicitly mentioned, Alcott grants her heroine the traits indelibly
associated with mesmerism in the nineteenth century: a piercing gaze, the ability to
provoke physical sensations, and a mysterious power to conform others' wills to her
own" (835). Gaul goes on to describe how, through Gerald and Jean, Alcott creates
a "mesmeric relationship" that is "a distorted sexual configuration, consisting of a
passive male complying with the physical gestures of an active, dominating female"
(842). Yet while Jean reverses gender roles with her mesmeric influence, she also
plays out her female role by exercising a positive influence on the members of the
Coventry family. There is, therefore, an "overlap of mesmeric powers with sentimental
influence" (Gaul 843).

The Mask of Femininity

Jean's performances are so convincing that even the reader may occasionally find
themselves wondering what to believe. Throughout the story lines are blurred
between appearances and truth, performance and natural behavior, deception and
sincerity, the theatrical stage and reality, the public and the private. On the one hand,
the reader is aware that everything Jean does is planned, intentional and a part of her
greater scheme. Instead of submitting to society's expectations, she takes control and
"commands total sway over the lives of others by means of a monstrous perversion
of the sentimental concept of woman's influence" (Halttunen 241). Jean Muir rejects
"cultural codes that hold out the promise of power to women if they accept passivity,
objectification, and submission as their lot; boldly, she replaces sentiment with the
'power in a woman's wit and will'" (Gaul 849). All of her actions are motivated by

vengeance and relentless ambition. Like Alcott's other Gothic heroines, Jean Muir "[leads an] aggressive, selfish [life] from 'behind a mask,' a mask that disguises a rebellion against the cult of true womanhood" (Halttunen 241). On the other hand, the distinction between real and mock virtue is not a simple one. Jean's manipulation of contemporary notions regarding femininity is uncanny because there is no clear boundary between the woman she is and the woman she pretends to be. She actually possesses the feminine abilities and domestic talents that initially make her so attractive to her employers; she knows how to cater to the needs of others, treats her employers with reverence, and displays a wide range of skills desirable in a woman: among other things, she is a gifted musician and an able nurse.

All the while, one must remember that Jean obviously does not identify with the sentimental view of womanhood: she only uses it as the most efficient tool in achieving her own selfish, *unfeminine* goals. She exhibits desirable feminine traits in order to gain the favor of the male members of the Coventry family: her apparent modesty, humility and submission appeal to their vanity, ego-centrism and sense of superiority. In this way, the myth of femininity is challenged as Jean Muir plans and participates "in a series of poses and attitudes based on cultural cliches of femininity, exposing both the socially constructed nature of men's desire and her own expert, almost *professional*, distance from it" (Soltysik 90). In the introduction to *Alternative Alcott*, Elaine Showalter writes that Jean Muir "always acts the feminine parts that her society allows her, but acts them with a brilliance that exposes their artifice and emptiness" (xxx). Because it is often unclear whether she is playing a part or whether she is herself, it becomes impossible to measure the *naturalness* of her femininity: the implication being that femininity itself is *unnatural*, an *act*.

By deconstructing the concept of femininity, "Behind a Mask" offers a comment on the situation of the nineteenth-century woman in America: perhaps women who adhered to the values propagated by the cult of true womanhood were all actresses wearing masks, living up to socially imposed norms simply due to lack of any other option. In fact, if one looks at Alcott's literary output as a whole, many of her protagonists act, pretend, and impersonate in one way or another:

> While the March family saga is clearly concerned with learning how to 'act' properly in everyday life, the sensational fiction is entirely about improper uses of acting, i.e., dissimulation and deception. Many of the characters are professional actors and actresses. Yet, even when the characters are not stage professionals, they perform or 'act' constantly[.] (Soltysik 100)

Although there seem to be significant disparities between her domestic fiction and her sensational writing as far as the purpose of acting is concerned, ultimately, it seems that either way acting is inevitable in the life of a woman. The hidden message in both her domestic fiction and her sensational writing could therefore be that

submission to the prevailing ideology, acting out "little womanhood," is preferable considering that rebellion against it will be severely punished. Alcott's work implies that:

> the true Victorian woman was, above all, a skilled actress, who schooled her emotions, curbed her rebelliousness, and learned to play the role assigned to her within her family. Behind her mask of domestic respectability might lurk and angry Apollyon or a villainous Hugo, but within the domestic drama the inner demon might be controlled, even if it could not be exorcized. (Halttunen 245)

Jean's final triumph has everything to do with her being able to hide behind a mask and playing the part of "little woman." Judith Fetterley writes that "[the] sub-title is 'A Woman's Power'; that power is located in Jean's ability to act. To the degree that an actor is an artist, *Behind a Mask* asserts that women are powerful in proportion to their success as artists" and that "Alcott's tale links women's survival to their artistic ability" ("Impersonating 'Little Women'" 12).

Alcott emphasizes this connection and adds depth to her character by making an analogy between Jean Muir and the biblical heroine Judith, whom Jean portrays during a dramatic evening, when the Coventry family gathers with friends to participate in a series of *tableaux vivants*:

> A swarthy, darkly bearded man lay asleep on a tiger skin, in the shadow of a tent. Oriental arms and a drapery surrounded him; an antique silver lamp burned dimly on a table where fruit lay heaped in costly dishes, and wine shone redly in half-emptied goblets. Bending over the sleeper was a woman robed with barbaric splendor. One hand turned back the embroidered sleeve from the arm which held a scimitar; one slender foot in a scarlet sandal was visible under the white tunic; her purple mantle swept down from snowy shoulders; fillets of gold bound her hair, and jewels shone on neck and arms. She was looking over her shoulder toward the entrance of the tent, with a steady yet stealthy look, so effective that for a moment the spectators held their breath, as if the also heard a passing footstep. (50)

There are many ways in which one could read the aligning of Jean with Judith, a woman who seduces and murders her oppressor. Elaine Showalter writes that for many nineteenth-century artists "the story of Judith had become an icon of the vengeful and castrating woman" ("Introduction" to *Alternative Alcott* xxx). Because playing the part of Judith allows Jean to display the intensity of her own personal hatred and desire for power, even Gerald notices that what he sees is "not all art" (51). Just as Judith succeeds in beheading the drunk Holofernes after being invited to his tent, Jean succeeds in deceiving the Coventry family. However, at this point in the story the lines between art and reality, performance and truth, are effectively blurred:

this scene reveals as much as it conceals. After all, Judith was a virtuous woman, whose actions saved her city from the attack of Holofernes's brutal army. Perhaps the suggestion is that Jean's actions could also be justified, that she acts the way she does not only out of sheer spite and anger, but also out of necessity, because she sees no other way of saving herself.

A Life Governed by Inner Conflict

In many ways, Jean Muir represents Alcott's own inner conflict regarding the simultaneous need to adhere to expectations and the desire to rebel against them. One must keep in mind that the ideologies the author cynically attacks in "Behind a Mask" affected her on a very personal level. When she was a child, her parents, Amos Bronson Alcott and his wife Abigail May Alcott "struggled, as the cult of domesticity demanded, to make their household into an enclave against the materialism and conformity of Jacksonian society" (Strickland 19). Bronson Alcott, an educational reformer, actively participated in the upbringing and education of his daughters: his primary concern being their moral character. His methods were based on "reasoning with children, giving praise and affection as a reward, and practicing isolation and withdrawal of affection as forms of punishment" (Strickland 28). One can only imagine the influence this type of upbringing had on an energetic, stubborn and willful child such as Louis was. Elaine Showalter claims that Bronson's methods caused the rebellious girl Louisa to become a self-doubting adult with a low self-esteem and depressing sense of worthlessness ("Introduction" to *Alternative Alcott* xii). Louisa May Alcott desperately wanted to live up to her father's expectations, but she never could, and so their relationship was based on a constant struggle and lack of understanding.

Alcott began to rebel and express her resentment early on: like Jean Muir, she did so by being a subversive actress. While her father believed in the educational value of "theatrical performances of moral allegories," Louisa expressed far more interest in turbulent melodramas (Halttunen 233). The theater accompanied her throughout her entire childhood and early adulthood. When she was ten years old, she was the author-director of the "Louy Alcott Troupe," which later "gave way to family tableaux and dramatic performances in the Hillside barn" in Concord (Stern, "Introduction" to *Behind a Mask* xi). In 1848, due to serious financial difficulties, the family moved to Boston (Cheney 53), where the Alcott sisters continued to nurture their avid interest in the theater. Louisa wrote and directed, Anna was responsible for sets and props, Lizzie was in charge of costumes, and all of the girls performed on stage (Saxton 174). Martha Saxton, Louisa May Alcott's somewhat controversial biographer, claims that the plays Alcott authored at the time were inspired by "her own tragic sense of being unloved" (174). The critic continues her argument by referring to Alcott's particular fondness for male roles: "Louisa played the male roles, with lots of mustache-twirling and stomping of boots, to Anna's breathless

leading ladies. Louisa wrote about women's heartbreak, but she dissociated herself from it at the performance, lining herself up on the side of the strong, who are not victims of their hearts" (174). Like Jean Muir, Alcott refused to simply accept the part of gentle, passive, meek "breathless leading lady"—instead the sought roles that enabled her to seize power from "behind a mask." In this sense, the novella seems to be a continuation of Alcott's "rebellion against her father's utopian domestic ideal," which began when she was a child delving into the depths of thrilling melodramas (Halttunen 233).

Louisa May Alcott also had a strained relationship with the larger philosophical movement to which her father belonged: Transcendentalism. The Transcendentalists—particular Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and, of course, her own father, Amos Bronson Alcott—had an enormous influence on Alcott. It is telling that both Emerson, a close friend of the Alcott family, and Thoreau, whom the young Louisa often accompanied "on his daily hikes through the Concord woods" (Seelye 150), served as inspirations for the male characters of Alcott's literature. While she "embraced the transcendental ideals of self-expression, self-reliance, and self-exploration" (Estes and Lant 99), as well as their contempt for materialism and conformity, Alcott remained aware of the shortcomings of the transcendental philosophy. In *Labor Pains: Emerson, Hawthorne, and Alcott on Work and the Woman Question*, Carolyn R. Maibor writes about "the repressed frustration... evident to varying degrees in much of Alcott's writing" (88). She describes it as:

> stemming in large part from her constant struggle to align her inner sense of her own needs and abilities with her awareness of the outer limitations and expectations of the world around her—not only society at large, but more particularly, the vibrant yet constraining society of Transcendental Concord. As her journals frequently show, the 'progressive' world of her father and his friends and neighbors—including Emereson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau—was both stimulating and burdensome. (88)

Maibor goes on to discuss the ways in which the transcendental philosophy often excluded women; for example, Emersonian self-reliance applied specifically to young men, for whom personal development was much easier than for women, who were "restricted in terms of entrance to the professions" and by prevalent social norms regarding femininity, which was associated with domesticity, family life, motherhood, and passivity (88).

Martha Saxton even writes about the inscription of these notions into the transcendentalist thought. Nineteenth-century American author Octavius Brooks Frothingham described the "spiritual eminence of woman" as "a transcendental tenet" (66). However, this preoccupation with women had to do specifically with the woman's relationship to the man. Saxton notes that "[Bronson] Alcott and Emerson repeatedly used the word womanly to describe traits such as intuitive understanding, diffidence, receptivity, warmth—in short, qualities that made the men feel welcome"

(66). This ideology was particularly oppressive for unmarried women, such as Louisa May Alcott:

> Victorian single women had not so much a role as a caricature to play. And while the transcendentalists idealized women, it was their qualities in contrast and in relation to men that preoccupied them. They were not concerned with the woman by herself, as an assortment of human characteristics. She was defined in terms of her pliability, her maternal qualities, her ability to soothe, comfort, support, and respond to men. Her own desires, talents, and concerns were of no weight in measuring her social desirability. (220)

Femininity, therefore, emerges as a social construct, which reflects male desires and is designed to cater to the needs of men. The woman as an individual simply does not exist.

Louisa May Alcott was a victim of her times. She was aware that quite often her behavior, her beliefs and her desires were incompatible with social norms regarding womanhood, with the philosophy her father and the transcendentalists preached, and with the expectations of her family. Her life and, by extension, literary career were haunted by the constant struggle between "self-sacrifice and self-fulfillment, social respectability and personal gratification, allegiance to family and desire for autonomy, yearning for ambition and retreat into disparaging self-effacement" (Grasso 180).

The author channeled much of her anger, frustration and anxiety into her story about Jean Muir, but, in the course of the story, she also succeeded in partially resolving some of these negative emotions. Martha Saxton has said of Alcott's writing that it was "a receptacle for her fantasies and desires" and that the author "literally emptied herself into her books" (8): this statement surely holds true for "Behind a Mask: or, A Woman's Power." During her brief experience as a domestic servant, the teenaged Alcott learned that she could either passively accept degrading treatment or rebel and be punished. The older, more devious Jean Muir—in all likelihood Alcott's alter ego—manages to overcome this impasse. Through her, Alcott is able to make accusations, unleash "her feminist anger at a world of James Richardsons" (Stern, "Introduction" to *Behind a Mask* xiv), and symbolically avenge her wrongs.

Jean Muir and Louisa May Alcott as Little Women

The connection between Louisa May Alcott and her character is all the more fascinating when one considers the way in which the story foreshadows its author's fate or, more specifically, the fate of her literary career. Alcott eventually abandoned sensational writing, which provided her with the liberty to critique from behind a mask (writing anonymously or under a pseudonym), instead turning to the more acceptable domestic fiction that brought her fame and fortune. Judith Fetterley,

who describes *Little Women* as a mask in itself, writes that in her Gothic tale "Alcott provides us with a frighteningly prophetic vision of the act she will eventually perform: in order to survive economically, Jean Muir, the heroine of the story, adopts the mask of femininity and impersonates the character of a 'little woman'" ("Impersonating 'Little Women'" 1). Similarly, Elaine Showalter suggests that Alcott, "like Jean Muir, cynically played 'little woman' in order to succeed in the terms allowed by her society" ("Introduction" to *Alternative Alcott* xlii): both women *act* according to nineteenth-century gender expectations and publicly subscribe to the cult of true womanhood and this ability to wear the mask of femininity leads to their success.

The significant difference between Jean Muir and Louisa May Alcott is that in her use of the mask of femininity the former is primarily motivated by the desire to gain wealth, something which cannot, with full sincerity, be said of the latter. To claim that *Little Women* was written solely to bring financial gain is a mistake. Alcott herself doubted that her novel would be very successful: a sentiment she recorded in her journal at the time (Cheney 198). She did not enjoy the process of writing it either. Given these circumstances, how is one to understand the author's decision to accept the task of writing a novel for girls?

In seeking the answer to this question, it is useful to turn to Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as Masquerade" and to notice the similarities between the puzzling behavior of the patient described in the paper and that of Louisa May Alcott. The woman whom Riviere describes is a confident, intelligent woman who, as part of her profession, often has to speak before an audience. However, "in spite of her unquestionable success and ability" after each such public performance "she would be excited and apprehensive all night after, with misgivings whether she had done anything inappropriate, and obsessed by a need for reassurance" (304). This in turn would lead her to seek attention from the male members of the audience, with whom she would flirt "in a more or less veiled manner" (305). In searching for the source of this woman's anxiety, Riviere looks at her patient's childhood experiences with her parents and discovers that "her adolescence had been characterized by conscious revolt against [her father], with rivalry and contempt of him" (305) and that later in life "she had quite conscious feelings of rivalry" over other men (father-figures): the same men, surprisingly, whose attention she would seek after her speeches. Apparently, because the speech act put the woman in a temporary position of power, the anxiety she experienced after these performances was a result of her fear that the father would discover that she had stolen something that was rightfully his and punish her for it. To avoid this fate, the woman "renounces her status as the subject of speech (as a lecturer, as an intellectual woman with a certain amount of power), and becomes the very image of femininity" (Doane 42). In Riviere's own words:

> The exhibition in public of her intellectual proficiency, which was in itself carried through successfully, signified an exhibition of herself in possession of the father's penis, having castrated him. The display once

over, she was seized by a horrible dread of the retribution the father
would then exact. Obviously it was a step towards propitiating the anger
to endeavour to offer herself to him sexually. (305)

Of course, to describe Alcott's relationship with her father as one based
on rivalry and contempt would be a risky overstatement. Nonetheless, there was a
frequent lack of understanding between them. Bronson Alcott made it clear that he
found Louisa a difficult child to raise. As she grew older, Alcott's attitude towards her
father and his philosophical views was marked by ambivalence. While she admired
some of his ideas, she mocked others, such as her father's failed attempt to establish
a utopian community.

Louisa May Alcott may not have identified so much with her father as she
did with the general concept of masculinity itself, which she associated with energy,
strength, activity, agency, ambition and power. A teenaged Alcott wrote in her
journal: "I was born with a boy's spirit under my bib and tucker" (Cheney 85). As an
adult, she was an active supporter of woman's suffrage and fought so that a strictly
male right could become a female one as well. Once the Civil War began, Alcott was
disappointed that she could not take part as a solider, so she chose to participate in
the war as a nurse instead: "I long to be a man," she wrote in her journal, "but as I can't
fight, I will content myself with working for those who can" (Cheney 127). Louisa
May Alcott also fulfilled a typically male role by supporting her family financially
throughout her entire life.

The author could not reconcile her identification with the masculine with
her father's expectations and society's requirements regarding women. Hence, as
Riviere's patient flirts with men, offering herself to them "in order to compensate for
her 'lapse' into subjectivity (i.e., masculinity in Riviere's analysis)" (Doane 42), Alcott,
analogously, puts on the mask of femininity by writing *Little Women*. "Through the
character of Jo March, Alcott performed literary penance for her greatest sins against
the cult of domesticity: her flight to Washington, her Gothic period, her consuming
literary ambition, and her refusal to marry" (Halttunen 243). In a number of ways,
Alcott returns masculinity to the castrated father. For one, she wrote the novel as
a favor to her father: the publisher Thomas Niles refused to publish a book that
Bronson Alcott was working on at the time, unless his daughter wrote a children's
novel for him. Additionally, the story preaches many of her father's values and the
March sisters strive for moral excellence by using Bronson Alcott's favorite allegory,
John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Halttunen 243). Furthermore, in the course of
the story, Jo, based on Louisa May Alcott herself, undergoes a drastic change owing
to the positive influence of the apparently morally and intellectually superior father-
figure Professor Bhaer, who later becomes her husband. It is also significant that in
Little Women, Louisa May Alcott has the head of the March family participate in the
Civil War, while his wife and daughters stay at home awaiting his return. Through the
novel, order is restored.

Jean Muir, like Louisa May Alcott, is motivated by desires that are gendered masculine in her cultural setting—the governess is overcome by "the desire to win; the desire for revenge; the desire to manipulate, dominate, and control" (Fetterley, "Impersonating 'Little Women'" 11)—but her use of the mask of femininity challenges the "natural order" rather than restoring it. At the end of the story, Edward Coventry brings his family together in order to reveal to them Jean's true identity and intentions by reading a series of letters that she had previously written to a close female friend. In theory, Edward is "unmasking" Jean. However, the reader is already rather well acquainted with Jean's schemes and hardly learns anything new about her. In an interesting twist, her letters, which are meant to incriminate her, contain details about the Coventry family, which hardly make them out to be innocent victims. While it is true that Jean deceives the family, the tricks that they fall for say more about them and their flaws than they do about her. Furthermore, the ease with which the devious Jean manages to play the part of perfect "little woman" exposes (unmasks) the inherent absurdity of sentimental cliches and the myth of femininity. Moreover, she reveals that the concept of masculinity could just as easily be deconstructed. Her success largely depends on the foolish arrogance of men who sincerely believe in their superiority over women and so, are willing to accept Jean's feminine behaviors as natural and normal: indeed, "since Gerald has done nothing to merit respect, regard, or confidence, the arrogance behind his calm acceptance of these attitudes as his due is considerable" (Fetterley, "Impersonating 'Little Women'" 9). Once it is revealed that it was all an act, that Jean had succeeded in fooling him by using his assumption of his own superiority against him, Gerald comes to the realization that it was she who had been in control, in a position of power all along and his actual inferiority is exposed. In a similar way "Riviere's patient, looking out at her own male audience, with impropriety, throws the image of their own sexuality back to them as 'game,' as 'joke,' investing it, too, with the instability and the emptiness of masquerade" (Doane 52).

The greatest shortcoming of Louisa May Alcott's novella is that although the author successfully uses Jean in order to attack nineteenth-century society and its values, she fails to say much about a female identity that could be found once socially imposed masks had been removed. Judith Fetterley notes that throughout the story the reader learns close to nothing about Jean's past and knows even less about her future: "both blank [of her past] and vacuum [of her future] indicate an absence of identity" ("Impersonating 'Little Women'" 13). The heroine consciously wears a mask, but it is unclear who exactly is beneath it.

During her first night at the Coventry home, after Jean has gone to her room and removed her disguise, she says to herself that "the curtain is down, so I may be myself for a few hours, if actresses ever are themselves" (11). Assuming that all women must be actresses in order to survive in a patriarchal society, this quote leads to the greater question: are women in such a society ever themselves? Perhaps, based on her own experiences, Alcott does not believe it to be possible. Ultimately, "Behind

a Mask: or, A Woman's Power" fails to provide any satisfactory, alternative identity for nineteenth-century women.

Works Cited

Alcott, Louisa May. "Behind a Mask: or, A Woman's Power." *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Madeleine Stern. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1995. 1-104. Print.

———. "How I Went Out of Service." *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 350-63. Print.

———. *Little Women*. 1868. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1934. Print.

Cheney, Ednah D. *Louisa May Alcott. Hey Life, Letters, and Journals*. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1889. Print.

Doane, Mary Ann. "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator." *Discourse* 11.1 (1988-89): 42-54. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Estes, Angela M., and Kathleen M. Lant. "Dismembering the Text: The Horror of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women." *Children's Literature* 17 (1989): 98-123. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Fetterley, Judith. "Impersonating 'Little Women': The Radicalism of Alcott's *Behind a Mask*." *Women's Studies* 10.1 (1983): 1-14. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

———. "'Little Women': Alcott's Civil War." *Feminist Studies* 5.2 (1979): 369-383. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Gaul, Theresa S. "Trance-Formations: Mesmerism and "A Woman's Power" in Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask*." *Women's Studies* 32 (2003): 835-851. Web. 1 March 2018.

Grasso, Linda. "Louisa May Alcott's 'Magic Inkstand': Little Women, Feminism, and the Myth of Regeneration." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 19.1 (1998): 177-92. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Halttunen, Karen. "The Domestic Drama of Louisa May Alcott." *Feminist Studies* 10.2 (1984): 233-254. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Hedgecock, Jennifer. *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat*. New York: Cambria Press, 2008. Print.

Kaledin, Eugenia. "Louisa May Alcott: Success and the Sorrow of Self-Denial." *Women's Studies* 5.3 (1978): 251-63. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Maibor, Carolyn R. *Labor Pains: Emerson, Hawthorne, and Alcott on Work and the Woman Question*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. 88-108. Print.

———. "Upstairs, Downstairs, and In-Between: Louisa May Alcott on Domestic Service." *The New England Quarterly* 79.1 (2006): 65-91. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Mulatu, Shimelis. "Major Themes in Louisa May Alcott's 'Behind a Mask, or A Woman's Power.'" Senior Essay. Addis Ababa Universtiy, 2011. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in*

the Age of Emerson and Melville. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. 387-437. Print.

Riviere, J. "Womanliness as a Masquerade." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929): 303-313. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Saxton, Martha. *Louisa May Alcott: A Modern Biography*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1995. Print.

Seelye, John D. *Jane Eyre's American Daughters: From The Wide, Wide World to Anne of Green Gables: A Study of Marginalized Maidens and What They Mean*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005. 139-161. Print.

Showalter, Elaine. "Introduction." *Alternative Alcott*. By Louisa May Alcott. 1988. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997. ix-xliii. Print.

Soltysik Monnet, Agnieszka. "Louisa May Alcott's Many Masks: An Encounter Between Feminism and Queer Theory." *SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature* 23 (2009): 83-106. Web. 1 Mar. 2018.

Stern, Madeleine. "Introduction." *Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott*. By Louisa May Alcott. New York: William Morrow & Company, 1995. vii-xxviii. Print.

Strickland, Charles. *Victorian Domesticity: Families in the Life and Art of Louisa May Alcott*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1985. Print.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-174. Web. 1 March 2018.

Anna Pochmara

Enslavement to Philanthropy, Freedom from Heredity: Amelia E. Johnson's and Paul Laurence Dunbar's Uses and Misuses of Sentimentalism and Naturalism

Abstract: The article analyzes dialogical relations between Amelia E. Johnson's *Clarence and Corinne, or God's Way* (1890), an evangelical conversion narrative of the Black Woman's Era, and *The Uncalled* (1898), the first novel of Paul Laurence Dunbar. As both texts feature racially indeterminate protagonists, draw on the drunkard's story, are set in small northern towns, and were published by African American writers within the space of less than a decade, they encourage an intertextual reading. *Clarence and Corinne* and *The Uncalled* recast the themes of reform, uplift, and charity and the ways in which these functioned in the sentimental and naturalist aesthetics. Representing the tension between the lower class and its reformers, Dunbar's and Johnson's narratives embrace social determinism and effectiveness of reform work yet they also demonstrate the limitations of sentimental empathy and problematize the opposition between the benevolent agency of the reformer and the helplessness of the brutalized victim.

Keywords: the Black Woman's Era, naturalism, sentimentalism, temperance, conversion narrative

> A genuine attachment had sprung up between the lonely old woman and the friendless boy.
> —Amelia E. Johnson, *Clarence and Corinne* (146)

> The man stood smiling down into the child's face: the boy, smiling back, tightened his grasp on the big hand. They were friends from that moment, Eliphalet Hodges and Fred.
> —Paul Lawrence Dunbar, *The Uncalled* (42)

The texts that I will analyze in this article, Amelia E. Johnson's *Clarence and Corinne, or God's Way* (1890) and Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Uncalled* (1898), were published by influential African American writers, yet they are largely absent from canonical debates about American fin-de-siècle literature. The former is an evangelical conversion narrative and has been acknowledged as a representative

of black appropriations of the sentimental tradition (Tate 11-12), and the latter has recently been positioned in the American canon of naturalism as a text that "probes the issues of spirituality, heritage, destiny, and the environment to explain social marginality and moral turpitude" (Jarrett 290). I will argue that the two novels do not ideally fit either sentimental or naturalist conventions but rather draw on both of them simultaneously, and thus they are an apt case study of the overlapping spaces between the two aesthetics. Furthermore, the many parallels between the two texts suggest that, in his first novel, Dunbar enters a dialogue with the Black Woman's Era, black women's outburst of literary activity represented by Johnson, which points to the dominant position of this body of African American writing at the turn of the twentieth century.

Although naturalism and sentimentalism are conventionally perceived as two distinct, almost oppositional traditions, frequently strongly gendered as masculine and feminine respectively (Williamson 7), they share significant features. Thematically, both are primarily interested in the underprivileged, and both highlight the significance of external influences in their narratives. Structurally, their sensational plotlines, abounding in coincidences, have been defined against the expectations for verisimilitude and plausibility set by literary realism.[1] *Clarence and Corinne* and *The Uncalled* exemplify these general similarities between sentimentalism and naturalism as well as their more nuanced shared concerns, such as representations of social reform and intemperance. Dunbar's and Johnson's texts, however, go beyond just exhibiting parallels between naturalism and sentimentalism. As a result of their indebtedness to both traditions, they recast them in meaningful ways. In both novels, the protagonists come from the underprivileged class and are orphaned at the beginning of the novel, but none is burdened with the naturalist plot of decline (Howard 142). Dunbar's work opens with a depiction of a lower-class neighborhood, and characteristically for naturalism, it is interpolated with philosophical enunciations about natural instincts that are suppressed by culture. Yet, it avoids typical naturalist pessimism, as the main character, Fred Brent, manages to transcend both his biological heredity of alcoholic parents and the inhibiting middle-class conditioning of his adoptive milieu. Analogously, Johnson's text focuses on children who emerge from a drunkard's home. Even though the detailed portrayal of the protagonists' family dwelling highlights its meaningful impact on Clarence's and Corinne's lives, they succeed in going beyond the expectations set up for them by the logic of social Darwinism. The euphoric endings of the narratives largely stem from their residual sentimental optimism regarding social change, which is guaranteed by genteel identification and empathy with the oppressed as well as narrative coincidences that reunite broken families.

On the other hand, both texts undercut the image of the benevolent agent

---

1   For analyses of sentimentalism in naturalist novels, see Jennifer Fleissner, *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism,* and Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism*.

of uplift. The novels strategically use the metaphors of slavery to depict the power of the newly adopted environment of respectable middle-class homes rather than to represent the force of biological heredity. Politically, their privileging of social rather than biological determinism supports the belief in the effectiveness of reform work and social transformation yet by representing the charitable guardians as enslavers, they complicate the sentimental discourse of empathy and uplift and problematize the opposition between the benevolent agency of the reformer and the helplessness of the brutalized victim. When such a blend of naturalism and sentimentalism in the novels is read in the context of the racial politics of the Nadir, it successfully balances the hope for change of the Jim Crow regime with attention to the structural conditions of the oppressed black minority.

Freedom from Intemperance

One of the points of intersection between naturalism and sentimental reform fiction is their preoccupation with alcohol use and intemperance. In naturalism, alcohol highlights human powerlessness, whereas in sentimentalism, it serves to construct images of victimhood and thus to increase its affective force. This theme is also central for *Clarence and Corinne, or God's Way* and *The Uncalled* as both works employ children of drunkards as their protagonists. An analysis of intemperance in the novels may shed light on another significant characteristic shared by Johnson's and Dunbar's texts, namely, their racially indefinite characters. The racial indefiniteness of the protagonists and their intemperate parents can be read as a strategy that distances the narratives from the contemporary retrogressionist images of black drinking. As Claudia Tate demonstrates, the rise of Jim Crow regime was accompanied with "the social theory... termed 'retrogressionism,'" according to which "the (alleged) sexual excesses of the recently emancipated [African Americans] were the result of their unrestrained retrogression into savagery" (10). This ideology was instrumental in the escalation of anti-black terrorism—white-on-black lynching and rape—at the turn of the twentieth century. Retrogressionism neatly merged with a strand of temperance rhetoric that employed racialized images of alcohol use. As Sherri Broder argues, "[a]lthough temperance advocates used the term [brute] to refer to all men who abused their families by their addiction to alcohol, by the late nineteenth century the brute had become a short-hand for immigrant and African American men" (100).[2] The black brute who cannot restrain his passions and appetites became a staple image of retrogressionist mythology.

   This controlling image of black intemperance can be illustrated with a short but representative quote from Thomas W. Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), a classic of retrogressionist literature, which depicts an African American soldier

---

2 For a more detailed reading of race in *Clarence and Corinne*, see Anna Pochmara "Tropes of Temperance, Specters of Naturalism: Amelia E. Johnson's *Clarence and Corinne*."

disrupting a wedding ceremony to kidnap the white bride: "The burly figure of a big negro trooper from a company stationed in the town stood before them. His face was in a broad grin, and his eyes bloodshot with whiskey. He brought his musket down on the floor with a bang" (125). The grotesque characterization of the figure is deeply related to his prior alcohol use: the large mouth dominates his face in an uncontrolled smile, and his red eyes lend it a threatening edge. A less explicit, but largely analogous, image can be found in a naturalist classic (Pizer 337), Theodore Dreiser's "Nigger Jeff" (1901). Dreiser, even if he was not the loudest champion of racial equality and integration, definitely was not an explicit advocate of retrogressionism either; in his articles, he argued that "there is room for a black republic or a black empire," and many African Americans evidence "intellectual power" (*Political Writings* 33). Yet the text's eponymous character is referred to as a "groveling, foaming *brute*" (44; emphasis added) and throughout the story is depicted as a dehumanized, animalistic, and grotesque. Lynched for accosting a white girl, he explains that "[he] didn't go to do it. [He] didn't mean to dis time. [He] was just drunk" (43-44), which positions alcohol at the center of the scene. Donald Pizer, discussing the text in a formalist way, disregards the factor of race and argues that Jeff simply represents sexual desire, "a dominant, uncontrollable force in almost all of Dreiser's principal male characters" (336). Yet although "sexual desire may not lead to the destruction of such a figure as Frank Cowperwood" (Pizer 336), Jeff is tortured and killed because his act is perceived as an example of deeply racialized retrogressionist mythology, not a result of a universal human or male desire. Both Dixon's black soldier and Dreiser's Jeff represent uncontrolled desires: drinking both evidences their lack of restraint and further increases their indulgence. Thus, written in the context of the black Nadir, Johnson's and Dunbar's works dissociate themselves from such dominant retrogressionist images of blackness through the elimination of racial markers.

By choosing racially ambiguous characters, Johnson and Dunbar avoid the retrogressionist connotations in their depictions of alcohol use, but they also depart from the traditional, racially unmarked temperance rhetoric, closely related to the sentimental tradition, which is examined by Elaine Parsons in her study *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (2003). In the traditional drunkard narrative as defined by Parsons, the enslaved drunkard is "a particularly promising young man," who falls because of "external influences" (11); he is tempted by older men or by palatial urban saloons. Thus, in a direct contrast to the drunken brute of retrogressionism, he is cast as a victim, not an aggressor, and evokes the reader's sympathy, not fear or outrage. One of the central metaphors of this discourse was "slave to the bottle," which identified intemperance with slavery and mobilized an analogous affect to the sympathy for the enslaved evoked in abolitionist discourse. Even though its use goes back to the antebellum days, as Parsons observes, it "continued well after emancipation, even to the end of the century" (28). In the late 1800s, the sentimental metaphor of enslavement

to one's appetite began to resonate with the emergence of naturalist determinism. Determinist skepticism regarding human volition was largely analogous to the sentiments expressed in temperance rhetoric. Hence, although devoid of the affective excess that characterizes sentimentalism, naturalist denial of free will largely overlaps with the rhetoric of enslavement and victimhood in reform fiction.

In contrast to the hegemonic drunkard narrative, neither Dunbar's nor Johnson's novel uses the metaphor of slavery to depict intemperance. Furthermore, both avoid sentimental empathy for the inebriate as neither of the drunkard fathers is "a promising young man." In fact, the reader is unable to identify with them as they are hardly given any background history. At the beginning of each text, they strongly remind of the drunken brute, though neither is represented as ethnically or racially marked. In Johnson's narrative, James Burton's presence is first visible in the result of his intoxicated behavior: his wife's "swollen eye" suggests that he has been a violent brute (7). Subsequently, Mr. Burton disappears from the novel and is not heard of until the last but one chapter entitled "Reunion," when his death is reported in papers. In *The Uncalled*, Tom Brent is explicitly introduced in a dialogue as "a brute" who used to give his wife "sich beatin's... when he was in liquor you never heerd tell of" so she has divorced him (6). He reappears as a reformed temperance activist to die just before the narrative's ending. Thus, the drunkards are largely erased from the plots. Despite their absence, they perform a significant function: throughout the novels, due to the dominance of social Darwinism and eugenics, their haunting images determine society's attitudes to and expectations for their children, especially sons. As the young protagonists struggle to separate from their heritage and all emerge triumphant, Johnson and Dunbar undermine the theory of hereditary determinism and the idea that "blood will tell" (Dunbar 69). The ending of *The Uncalled*, as Gene Jarrett argues, "resists portraying Fred, and even his father, as insurmountably degenerate" (293). *Clarence and Corinne* is less optimistic in regard to Mr. Burton, yet it also leaves some hope for his reformation in the form of his deathbed confession: "He expressed sorrow for his misspent life, but laid all the blame on whisky" (178). Such ambivalent closures—in contrast to the final destruction by alcohol or complete redemption that characterize drunkard narratives—do not offer easy sympathy for the inebriate and do not position him as a victim. At the same time, they express the belief in change and transformation, which is central to the logic of the novels.

Dunbar's *The Uncalled*, apart from revising the drunkard narrative in its plot, also offers an implicit metatextual commentary on temperance discourse and sentimentalism. Its young protagonist, Fred Brent, exposes the paradox of sympathy for reformed drunkards. When thinking about his father's conversion, he cannot forget about his unreformed past: "Tom Brent, temperance advocate, sometime drunkard and wife-beater" (223). Fred is outraged that "his father, after having led the life he had, should make capital out of relating it" (228). As a former minister, in his divagations, he refers to the biblical rhetoric but rather than embrace it, he challenges

its logic: "Of course they tell us that there is more joy over the one lamb that is found than over the ninety and nine that went not astray; it puts rather a high premium on straying" (230). The novel enables Fred to vent his anger at the father, which is much more elaborately depicted than their understated reconciliation preceding the death of old Tom Brent. Father's homecoming is important for Fred because he is able to tell his father that he has ruined his life and "left [him] a heritage of shame and evil" (237). In contrast to anger, forgiveness does not come easily: "Could he forgive him? Could he forget all that he had suffered and would yet suffer on this man's account?" (237). Only the moral suasion of his adoptive father Eliphalet enables Fred to say, "I forgive you, father" (237). Thus *The Uncalled* enters a dialogue with the sentimental sympathy for the drunkard in temperance rhetoric both by revising the plot of the temperance tale and by an explicit rhetorical attack against it in Fred's internal monologue, focusing on anger rather than forgiveness.

There is one more way in which Dunbar rewrites the drunkard story, for which "the maleness of the subject" was central (Parsons 21). Even though the inebriate father is the dominant image haunting Fred in Dunbar's novel, the text represents also his mother as intemperate. Strongly resembling the mother of Stephen Crane's Maggie, rarely sober, "Margaret had never been a particularly neat housewife" (6), and her house is "miserably dirty" and dilapidated (6). An image of female drinking is also repeated towards the end, during a temperance meeting, where the audience listens to "experiences from women whose husbands had been drunkards and from husbands whose wives had been similarly afflicted" (218). Thus the text problematizes the easy identification of intemperance with masculinity. The peculiar gender equality parallels the lack of racial markers in the novel. When read in the context of determinist philosophy and eugenic discourse, *The Uncalled*'s downplaying of race or gender markers deemphasizes the significance of internal, biological, and hereditary factors. Moreover, as men can also be victims of their wives' intemperance, the text further challenges the correlation between black masculinity, the stereotypical drunken brute, and its white female victims.

There is one more way in which the two novels undermine the notion of hereditary intemperance and the determinist force of "demon drink." Neither text shows any moments when the children of drunkards are drawn to drinking although sons in both works migrate to the city and are exposed to its mythical temptations. Their behavior stands in stark contrast both to the sentimental drunkard narrative and to the naturalist classics dealing with the notion of alcohol use, such as Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and Jack London's *John Barleycorn* (1913), whose young characters enter saloons at the first invitation. London's autobiographical persona states that "here was John Barleycorn, prevalent and accessible everywhere in the community": "I found saloons, on highway and byway, up narrow alleys and on busy thoroughfares, bright-lighted and cheerful, warm in winter, and in summer dark and cool" (953). More figuratively, in *Maggie*, "the open mouth of a saloon call[s] seductively to passengers to enter" (30): a female anthropomorphization

of a barroom lures its male victims in the dark street of the city. In Dunbar's and Johnson's texts, the protagonists easily avoid the seductive calling of saloons and accessible alcohol. In Cincinnati, Dunbar's Fred is "surprised and sickened" (203), when he sees children fetching beer for their parents or "a mother holding a glass of beer to her little one's lips" (203), and he does not enter a beer garden, when his roommate wants to introduce him to city life. Analogously, Johnson's Clarence, after he moves to the city, refuses to join his friends "in their nightly frolics" despite their "calling him names and poking fun at him" (82). Thus, the black novels balance the attention to the meaningful impact of the social context with the characters' self-determination and volition. The use of the intemperate parents helps them underline the possibility to transcend biological heritage, yet they also portray the difficult struggle against the eugenic logic that is all-pervasive in late nineteenth-century U.S. society. Whereas the metaphor of slavery was used to talk about intemperance at the time, Dunbar and Johnson use intemperance to talk about the powerful impact of social expectations rooted in eugenic thinking and the possibility of self-determined action and advancement. Images of slavery are reserved in both texts for a different theme.

Slaves to Charity

In Parson's analysis, "slaves to the bottle" are complemented with "redeeming women" who reform them. Both Dunbar's and Johnson's works use metaphors of and allusions to slavery, yet these do not concern intemperance but the female figure who charitably takes over the control of the drunkard's broken home. In Dunbar's text, Fred is adopted by strict unmarried Hester Prime and forced by her to enter the ministry. The stifling religiosity and discipline of his guardian is represented as analogous to slavery and bondage. At some point, he rebels and decides to leave his new family. Fred announces then that he is "going to spend the first few days just in getting used to being free" (194) to which Miss Hester bitterly responds that he "think[s] that [he has] been a slave" (194). Even though he objects, his later thoughts on the powerful impact of religious education actually reinforce the simile of enslavement: "He had hated the severe discipline of his youth, and had finally rebelled against it and renounced its results as far as they went materially. This he had thought to mean his *emancipation*" (209). Thinking about Hester Prime's training, Fred uses vivid metaphors of bondage, such as "a chain that galled his flesh" (57), "iron bands" (209), or a "yoke whose burden he hated he was placing about his own neck" (210). Even away from her, he feels "bound, irrevocably bound" (170). "He had run away from the sound of 'right' and 'duty,' but had not escaped their power" (210). Hence the rigid religiosity and controlling influence of Miss Hester are represented as analogous to slavery and antithetical to freedom and growth. These images interestingly resonate with the representation of the guardian of Corinne, the girl protagonist from Johnson's novel. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, Corinne, the daughter of the drunkard is treated by Miss Penrose as a slave ("Tropes" 55).

She is "overworked and underfed," Miss Penrose "pays her no wages," and the girl is confined to the space of the household. Thus, in both texts, genteel agents of uplift are represented as slave owners.

Additionally, there are many more detailed parallels between the two guardians. Both are referred to as "stern," and their judgmental perspective on the lower class is highlighted. Just as Johnson's Miss Penrose cannot understand how lower-class people "could be so *shiftless*" (22-23; emphasis added), Miss Prime's voice is "a trumpet of scathing invective against the *shiftlessness*" of the "denizens of the poorer quarter" (34; emphasis added); she concludes that Fred's mother "ought n't never to 'a left her husband" and "the child is better off without her example" (7-8; emphasis added). In the emergent eugenic rhetoric, shiftlessness, next to crime and disease, was a code word of racial and class difference. As Robin D. G. Kelley shows in a chapter tellingly entitled "Shiftless of the Word Unite," the notion of shiftlessness was central in what he calls the "Cult of True Sambohood," an ideology that soothed white anxieties about black presence at the labor market (21-22). Accordingly, the use of the term by the two white female guardians possibly invests both their protégées in particular and the lower class in general in the with racial difference.[3] The whiteness and privileged position of the guardians are emphasized in the representations of their *white gaze*. Whereas in *Clarence and Corinne* "Keen grey eyes of the seamstress" are depicted as looking sharply at people (50), in *The Uncalled* Miss Prime has a "cold grey eye" that "impales" her lower-class neighbor with "an annihilating glance" (27). In both texts, the women's judgmental look is coded with "grey" eyes in contrast to the dark eyes of the children. Fred's "brown eyes" are at one point "sparkling with amusement" (26), and Corinne's eyes are repeatedly referred to as black or dark (9, 14, 87). Hence the guardian's gaze, apart from class superiority, might be also informed with racial condescension.

In both cases, the adoptive households are very respectable and pristine, which follows the domestic ideal in the sentimental tradition (Tompkins 143, 178). The devotion to cleanliness also parallels the critical gaze of the narrator-observer in naturalist fiction, which painstakingly records the lower-class lack of hygiene and marks it with ethnic difference (Banerjee 122-123). Dunbar and Johnson problematize the identification of a clean household with moral purity, and thus they challenge the ideology of genteel respectability, yet they also point to the dominance of such thinking. The devotion to cleanliness of the middle-class guardians is manifested in both texts already at their beginnings, when they take over the cleaning of the dilapidated and dirty households of the orphaned children. Their own homes are accordingly immaculate. In Johnson's text, this is interpreted by the community as a univocal sign of a good adoptive environment. Corinne's brother draws the conclusion "from the very tidy appearance of the house" that she

---

3   For the relationship between non-Anglo-Saxon ethnicities, eugenics, and the notion of "shiftlessness," see James C. Wilson, "Evolving Metaphors of Disease in Postgenomic Science: Stigmatizing Disability."

is "fortunate in having such a home" (48). Also the teacher who visits the girl initially expects that "the prim Miss Rachel Penrose," "apparently a very exemplary woman" with "a good home," would guarantee the child's happiness (55). In *The Uncalled*, the pedantic house of Fred's guardian mimics the patronizing attitude of the owner. Miss Prime's windows look at the "mean street" like "a pair of accusing eyes" (32). The "the prim cottage" is "painted a dull lead colour" and the flowers are "planted with such exactness and straightness" that they look "cramped and artificial and stiff as a party of angular ladies dressed in bombazine" (32). In contrast to Johnson's novel, Dunbar's text, however, also explicitly expresses the lower-class perspective on Miss Prime's "maidenly neatness" (12). Mrs. Warren, one of Fred's mother's friends expresses her sympathy for the boy: "He won't dare to breathe from this hour on" (31). Even though Mrs. Warren does not have much sympathy of the narrative—she robs the orphaned home of Fred after the funeral of his mother's belongings—her judgment regarding Miss Prime's approach to upbringing is largely correct and challenges the idea of noble charity. Overall, the images of the two households highlight the condescension of naturalist observers and dispute the goodwill of sentimental angels of charity.

Both Miss Penrose and Miss Prime show a dramatic lack of understanding and empathy for the lives of the lower-class children and, as I have demonstrated, turn the lives of their protégées into a limited existence that the texts compare with slavery. Their patronizing attitudes and privileged economic positions connotatively comment upon middle-class reform activities. According to Broder, in the 1890s, in response to labor unrest, conservative reform activists expressed a "desire to exert more control over the immigrant and African American working class" (18), and Johnson's and Dunbar's texts might respond to such increased policing. Significantly, the novels imagine the reform workers as white females. It can be read as a critical commentary on the evangelical missionary zeal of privileged white women and their crusades in lower-class neighborhoods, which provided them with an opportunity to introduce social change but also to exercise power over the disadvantaged. Additionally, the ease with which the guardians take charge of the orphans' homes and the orphans themselves can be linked to their unmarried status, which is suggested in *The Uncalled*, when "Miss Hester move[s] about the room, placing one thing here, another there, but ever doing or changing something, all with *maidenly neatness*" (12; emphasis added). As Anna Lepine argues, "the spinster unsettled established notions of domestic space by seeming to be 'at home' anywhere" (v). As a result, at the turn of the century, for many, "the single woman was a threatening figure, suggesting women's independence from men" (Holmes 68). Dunbar's and Johnson's texts record and activate these anxieties, marking them with class and possibly race resentments.

As an analysis of the guardians and adoptive environments demonstrates, both texts are entangled in dialogues with contemporary reform discourse and determinist philosophy. Johnson and Dunbar point to the significance of the environment and external influence: their powerful impact is expressed in metaphors of enslavement. Moreover, their correlation of the notion of slavery with white middle-class women's

self-appointed guardianship of lower-class children can be read as a critique of the increased policing of the "other half."

Emancipation from Heredity

Johnson's and Dunbar's dialogue with temperance discourse and naturalist philosophy is most conspicuous in their preoccupation with the notion of heredity. As I have mentioned, in contrast to both temperance fiction and naturalist classics, neither text shows any moments when the children of inebriates are drawn to drinking although sons in both novels migrate to the city and are exposed to its mythical temptations and saloons. In Dunbar's and Johnson's works, the protagonists struggle thus not as much with their heredity as with the eugenic thinking of society. Its pervasiveness can be illustrated with the fact that in *Clarence and Corinne*, even Corinne's future husband, as a Sunday school child, sees her as "only a pauper," whose "father is nothing but a drunkard" (153; 155). At the beginning of the novel, Clarence laments that Corinne and he are "the children of a drunkard" and that "People don't even want to give [him] work because of it; and they call [him] 'old drunken Burton's boy'" (19-20). This is the key reason behind his decision to move to the city, among "new people—people who did not know him as 'old Jim Burton boy'" (78). Yet, the change of place is not enough to erase the internalized stigma. When Clarence is framed for stealing money and fired, he feels again "born to be downtrodden—crushed!" (116). What helps him overcome his despondence and begin a self-determined life is conversion, which he undergoes with the support of an evangelical missionary, Mother Carter. In a rewriting of the narrative analyzed by Parsons, here the redeeming woman saves the child rather than the fallen drunkard. Yet, the final moment that enables Clarence to come to terms with his origins is the news of his father's tragic death and his last words of repentance. Jim Burton's final remorse suggests that even the most degenerate brutes can change and hence enables his son to finally reject the notion of hereditary determinism.

In *The Uncalled*, the struggle against the influence of paternal heredity is depicted more elaborately. Fred, since childhood, is confronted with the idea that "blood 's bound to tell, an' with sich blood as he 's got in him [no one knows] what he 'll come to" (23). People object to his entrance into the ministry because "It 's ag'in' nature" that "Old Tom, drunken Tom, swearin' an' ravin' Tom Brent's boy [should become] a preacher!" (114). A manipulative animalistic metaphor is used to support this eugenic logic: "A panther's cub ain't a-goin' to be a lamb" (114). As a minister of his small congregation, Fred constantly feels that he is "fighting old Tom Brent" (179). The struggle with the image of his father accompanies the climactic twist, when Fred resigns from the position of the town's minister. After the elders oppose his decision not to stigmatize a young pregnant girl, he decides to leave, and explains that "You are saying that it is the old Tom Brent in me showing itself at last. Yes, it has smouldered in me long, and I am glad…. I would rather be the most roistering drunkard that ever reeled down these streets than call myself a Christian and carouse

over the dead characters of my fellows....Yes, old Tom, drunken Tom Brent's son despises you" (187-188). Fred uses the image of his father to highlight the hypocrisy of the congregation, and subsequently migrates to the city to leave behind his "past of sorrow and degradation" (222).

Yet the struggle against eugenic logic does not end with Fred's move to Cincinnati. Instead of being able to free himself from his father's shadow, the protagonist is forced to face him as the city, instead of providing anonymity, coincidentally reunites the son with his father. A newly reformed drunkard, Tom Brent is a temperance advocate. Fred feels that he "comes and lays a hand upon [him], and that [he is] more the son of Tom Brent [that] night than ever before" (222). After the encounter, Fred's "eyes [are] bloodshot, his face [is] pale, his step [is] nervous and weak" (224), and his landlady assumes that he is intoxicated. Thus at this moment, his father's former intemperance is mirrored in what the novel refers to as Fred's "beastly condition" (224)—the contact with his father touches the son with temporary inebriety. The confrontation, after much inner struggle on Fred's part, ultimately ends in reconciliation. Characteristically, Fred does not take up his father's position, but, to the contrary, his father takes the room and bed of the son. Dunbar thus rewrites a scene of a drunkard's reformation in his child's bed, which according to Karen Sanchez-Eppler is a staple image in temperance fiction (1). Yet, in contrast to the scenes analyzed in her article, Fred is empowered by the scene of reunion with his father, which enables his separation from the haunting image of the drunkard. The reconciliation ends Fred's Oedipus crisis: he is able to enter a relationship with a woman and get married. Overall, both for Clarence and for Fred, the final encounters with their fathers or their words help them soothe their anxiety over hereditary intemperance. Also, in contrast to many traditional temperance tales, both texts are more interested in saving the children rather than redeeming the drunkard fathers.

The Converted and the Uncalled

Apart from several strong parallels between the two narratives, there is an important difference, namely, their representation of conversion experience. Dunbar's and Johnson's rewritings of this trope need to be considered in the context of what Ann Douglass famously dubbed "the feminization of American culture," a process in which "The Victorian lady and minister" changed the literary scene (8). In the course of the nineteenth century, the religious sphere was domesticated and as a result became part of the woman's realm. Just like in the temperance narrative analyzed by Parsons, in sentimental conversion narratives, woman was positioned as a redeemer. As Jane Tompkins states, in sentimental rhetoric, women served as mediators between the unconverted and God (219). Woman's religious mission was strongly related to the rise of the ideology of suasion—the specifically feminine power of moral influence (Dorsey 116). Moral suasion enabled women to transcend the limits of the domestic

sphere since, as Tompkins argues in her generous reading of the sentimental tradition, "religious conversion" was positioned as "the necessary precondition for sweeping social change" (132), and the "process of redemption" could "change the entire world" (131). Conversion was supposed to lead to social transformation as it helped build a community alike in interests and feelings, and the woman's power of moral suasion was instrumental in its emergence.

Both African American novels recast the hegemonic scenario of woman's religious mission as analyzed by Douglas and Tompkins. The theme is especially significant in Johnson's novel—subtitled "God's Way" and originally published by American Baptist Publication Society. Although it largely embraces this element of the sentimental tradition, not all women in the text are true religious mentors. Before the model redeeming woman is introduced into the narrative, as I have mentioned, the first religious guardian—the stern, grey-eyed Miss Penrose—exploits Corinne rather than facilitates the moral growth of the girl. The novel mocks religious hypocrisy as Miss Penrose makes "a great show of piety" and "invariably attend[s] church in the morning, rain or shine, snow or blow" (57), yet prohibits her protégée from accompanying her to services. Instead, "acting the part of a Christian guardian," she makes "the child plod through [the Old Testament] verses" that are indecipherable to the girl and just make "her eyes and head ache" (58). Corinne's first step towards conversion is individual—she finds a Bible in her room, opens it at the New Testament, and the passages give her spiritual comfort.

In contrast to Corinne's individual encounter with the Bible, her brother, characteristically for the sentimental tradition, needs a woman as a mediator with God. After he is unjustly accused of theft and fired, he encounters Mother Carter, who "perform[s] her mission" among "those in want, never failing to put in a word or two of either advice, admonition or comfort" (121). Her power of suasion works also on Clarence, who "confesse[s] his sins and ask[s] earnestly to be forgiven, and then and there [gives] himself to God" (145). The novel's representation of conversion does not, however, completely follow sentimental expectations. First of all, Clarence finds his way to God in the city, which, in sentimentalism, is closely related to worldly sophistication and corruption of the wide world (Tompkins 81). Furthermore, the redeeming woman is not a respectable middle—class reformer as in the traditional sentimental novel, which "represents the interests of middle—class women" (Tompkins 140), but a representative of the underprivileged. Thus, Clarence accidentally meets a lower-class woman in the city streets, who uses her feminine influence to save him. This episode signifies on the popular scenario of urban corruption and seduction of a young man in the city. Johnson's text positions conversion—traditionally located in the domestic realm – in the city, and thus disrupts the neat binary opposition between the innocent country and corrupt urban landscape. Furthermore, by contrasting two Christian female guardians—the noble lower-class Mother Carter and the respectable but hypocritical Miss Penrose—Johnson expresses her anxiety regarding white middle-class missionary zeal.

After his conversion, the novel contrasts Clarence's former ambitions and "the prospect of [professional] advancement before him" with "God's way" (144). He stays with Mother Carter and does not seek work to "make more money" (147). From the point of view of capitalist efficiency, he seems unproductive as his work for Mother Carter is imperceptible for outsiders; Miss Penrose could judge him as a representative of the "shiftless" class. The narrator explicitly comments on the significance of such invisible work: "It is not always necessary that people should live very prominent and public lives in order to be useful. Lights are burning where the busy world sees them not; but that it does not see or know them does not alter the fact that they are performing their mission" (121). Even after he gets his education, Clarence does not go back to business but becomes a doctor instead. Typically for the sentimental tradition, the marketplace is represented as unpredictable and unjust, yet it does not morally corrupt the main character but makes him homeless. Yet— despite the novel's preoccupation with spiritual growth—it represents the economic hardships of migration and urbanization from a structural perspective that is indebted to the naturalist logic of social determinism.

In Dunbar's text—according to Robert Bone his "spiritual autobiography" (39)—already the title suggests that it will problematize the idea of calling and conversion. Against his guardian's hopes, Fred does not have a minister's calling. The awakening and emancipation he experiences in the novel result from his resolution to leave ministry (170; 209)—the first autonomous decision he makes. Ostentatiously religious women in the novel, just like in Johnson's text, are not successful "mediators between God and the unredeemed" (Tompkins 219). Hester Prime, as I have demonstrated, is depicted as an enslaving force. She is paired with the minister's daughter, who is unfavorably judged by the narrative as a "fool" and a "shallow woman" that with complacency "skims the surface of tragedy and thinks that she has sounded the depths" (121). The true redeemer in the first part of the novel is "Brother Hodges," Fred's adoptive father "a kindly-faced man," whose "supplication [i]s very tender and childlike.... He left all to God, as a child lays its burden at its father's feet, and many eyes were moist as the people rose from their knees" (17). Hodges's prayer strongly reminds of the biblical verse frequently repeated in Johnson's novel: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (65, 73, 109). When Fred leaves Dexter, "Poor Eliphalet... br[eaks] down and we[eps] like a child" (197). The incident takes "sunshine... out of the old man's life" (197). Not only is Eliphalet a more successful mediator between "God and the unredeemed," but he is also represented as a better parent than his wife, which clearly challenges the sentimental tradition's celebrations of mothering and feminine power of religious suasion.

Analogously to *Clarence and Corinne*, *The Uncalled* also problematizes the moral corruption related to the city in the sentimental tradition. In contrast to Miss Prime's predictions that in "a strange city full of wickedness an' sin," Fred might fall victim to "temptation sich as is layin' in wait fur young men" (195), migration to the city helps him renounce stiff religiosity, grow, and find his fulfillment. Significantly,

his stern guardian is juxtaposed with an urban woman, whose influence is represented in a much less restrictive way. Fred meets "a young lady… who is very much interested in church work, and somehow she has got [him] interested too, and [he goes] to her church every Sunday" (245). Alice's influence is positioned as parallel to that of Fred's adoptive father Hodges: "'I been a-prayin' fur you,' [Hodges] said. 'So has Alice,' replied the young man, 'though I don't see why she needs to pray. She's a prayer in herself'" (254). Thus Dunbar, analogously to Johnson, challenges the stereotypical ideas of an urban temptations and seductive women. Even though during his first days in Cincinnati, the protagonist admits that "The city indeed was full of temptations to the young" (206), the closure of the novel, which ends in Fred's settling down in the metropolis and his marriage to Alice, disproves the uniform identification of the city with sinfulness. Fred's story represents the experience of urban immigration, which was common for millions of turn-of-the-century Americans. When Fred's narrative is read more specifically as a commentary on the situation of the African American community, it represents the Great Migration of black people to the Northern cities as a possible way to emancipation from the Jim Crow regime.

As I have demonstrated, despite their differences, Johnson's and Dunbar's novels are entangled in parallel dialogues with contemporary reform discourse and determinist philosophy. Both highlight the significance of the environment and external influence, whose powerful impact is expressed in metaphors of enslavement. Additionally, their correlation of the notion of slavery with white middle-class women's self-appointed guardianship of lower-class children can be read as a critique of the policing of the "other half" by reform activists. Both texts underline the possibility of transcending biological heritage yet they also show the struggle against eugenic logic that is all-pervasive in the late nineteenth-century society. For the abject classes and races, the most destructive force is not the internal factor of heredity or the omnipresence of alcohol but the influence of Darwinist ideology. Especially in their revisions of the drunkard narrative and sentimental conversion narrative, the novels balance the attention to the meaningful impact of the social context and external influences, on the one hand, and the characters' self-determination and volition, on the other. Characteristically, despite their incorporation of determinism, the protagonists' plotlines do not end in decline. Even the brutal intemperate fathers express remorse and desire to change before they die. The racial indeterminacy of the characters in the novels enables the authors to avoid the immediate associations between black lower-class population and retrogressionist ideology. Furthermore, if racial unmarkedness is read as white, the texts evoke images of white male brutality and white female drunkenness, thus even further challenging the ideology of retrogressionism. On the other hand, it is possible to read protagonists in both texts as black, which offers a narrative of self-determined uplift of the black community: in the case of Johnson, ending in a homecoming and a formation of a larger extended family, in the case of Dunbar, a linear plot, ending with an independent nuclear family in the city.

Works Cited and Consulted

Banerjee, Mita. *Color Me White: Naturalism/Naturalization in American Literature*. Universitaetsverlag Winter, 2013.

Bone, Robert. *The Negro Novel in America*. Yale University Press, 1958.

Broder, Sherri. *Tramps, Unfit Mothers, and Neglected Children: Negotiating the Family in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.

Crane, Stephen. *The Open Boat and Other Stories*. Courier Corporation, 2012.

Dixon, Thomas. *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900*. Gregg Press, 1967.

Dorsey, Bruce. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*. Cornell University Press, 2002.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Political Writings*. University of Illinois Press, 2010.

Dreiser, Theodore. *Short Stories*. Courier Corporation, 2012.

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *The Uncalled: A Novel*. International Association of Newspapers and Authors, 1901.

Fabi, M. Giulia. "Taming the Amazon? The Price of Survival in Turn-of-the-Century African American Women's Fiction." *The Insular Dream: Obsession and Resistance*, edited by Kristiaan Versluys, Amsterdam University Press, 1995, pp. 228-241.

Fabi, M. Giulia. "White Lies: Amelia E. Johnson's Sunday School Fiction and the Politics of Racelessness." *Comparative American Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2007, pp. 7-35.

Fleissner, Jennifer L. *Women, Compulsion, Modernity: The Moment of American Naturalism*. University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Holmes, Katie. "'Spinsters Indispensable': Feminists, Single Women and the Critique of Marriage, 1890–1920." *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 110, 1998, pp. 68–90, doi:10.1080/10314619808596061.

Howard, June. *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*. University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

Jarrett, Gene Andrew. "Second-Generation Realist; Or, Dunbar the Naturalist." *African American Review*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2007, pp. 289–94. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40027062.

Kaplan, Amy. *The Social Construction of American Realism*. University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. Free Press, 1994.

Lepine, Anna. *The Old Maid in the Garret: Representations of the Spinster in Victorian Culture*. University of Ottawa, 2007. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.20381/ruor-19750

London, Jack. *Novels and Social Writings*. Library of America, 1982.

Parsons, Elaine Frantz. *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in*

the Nineteenth-Century United States. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Pizer, Donald. "Theodore Dreiser's 'Nigger Jeff': The Development of an Aesthetic." *American Literature*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1969, pp. 331–41. doi:10.2307/2923993.

Pochmara, Anna. "Tropes of Temperance, Specters of Naturalism: Amelia E. Johnson's Clarence and Corinne." *Atlantis*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2016, pp. 45-62.

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. "Temperance in the Bed of a Child: Incest and Social Order in Nineteenth-Century America." *American Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1995, pp. 1–33. doi:10.2307/2713323.

Spillers, Hortense. "Introduction" to Amelia E. Johnson *Clarence and Corinne, Or, God's Way*. Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. xxvii-xxxviii.

Tate, Claudia. *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*. Oxford University Press, 1996.

Tompkins, Jane P. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. Oxford University Press, 1985.

Williamson, Jennifer A. *Twentieth-Century Sentimentalism: Narrative Appropriation in American Literature*. Rutgers University Press, 2013.

Michał Choiński

Hyperbolic Bodies for Sale:
The Figurative Representations of Prostitutes
in Tennessee Williams's Early Works

Abstract: The article examines representations of prostitutes in the early works of Tennessee Williams. The characters of hustlers in two of his two short stories, "In Memory of an Aristocrat" (1940) and "One Arm" (1942-45) as well as one short drama, "Hello from Bertha" (1941), are discussed as representatives of Williams's employment of the hyperbolic figuration. In the case of each of the three examined characters, Choiński discusses the excessive and contrastive elements of descriptions which allow Williams to investigate the grotesqueness of human physicality on sale.

Keywords: Tennessee Williams, literary hyperbole, figurative excess, Southern literature

Introduction

In her recent study of Tennessee Williams's late dramas, Annette Saddik (2015) takes excess as a pivotal element of the playwright's artistic design. She observes that "William's excesses serve to highlight the ambiguities and inconsistencies of living in and experiencing the world—the excess that leaks out of closed systems of meaning, that seep through the cracks of the rational, the stable, the complete, and point toward the essence of the real" (Saddik 6). The creative employment of hyperbolic excess that allows Williams to break the Southern decorum and explore the lonesome, troubled world around him does not seem to be exclusive only to the plays he authored in the 1960s and the 1970s, when his well-documented struggles with addiction and depression coincided with his reputation as a playwright nosediving. Also, Williams's early short plays and short stories demonstrate the hyperbolic design in which a "mixture of exaggeration, chaos, ambiguity and laughter" (Saddik 5) triggers a liberation from the oppression of Southern propriety. In this aesthetics, human physicality remains central to Williams, both as a symbol as well as a theme, and the characters of hustlers who trade with their bodies in the disreputable districts of New Orleans and St. Louis,[1] are essential for Williams's artistic *idée fixe*—the confrontation

---

1   These two cities are of particular importance for Williams. Kenneth Holditch in his essay studies the playwright's relationship with New Orleans, the city he would sometimes called his "spiritual home" (193) and which "came to represent to him, if not the paradise

between the carnal and the spiritual.[2] In this article, three of Williams's early texts, two short stories, "In Memory of an Aristocrat" (1940), "One Arm" (1942-45) and one short drama, "Hello from Bertha" (1941), are studied to explore the tensions that surround Williams's hyperbolic representations of hustlers and their bodies.[3]

Plastic Hyperbole

A large part of Williams's spectacular success as a playwright can be attributed to his "plastic" theatrical design. A good example of it is his "memory play," which incorporated the psychological realism of despondency and desire with an unrealistic space, in which music and lights signified the removal from the present moment, and Strindbergian expressionism coalesced with the symbolism and neo-romantic storylines of tragic love, allowed Williams to appeal to the sensitivity of his audience on a fundamentally new level. Williams's hallmark "plastic" plays, like *Glass Menagerie* (1944) or *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) combine this artistic design with a plotline characterized by a fundamental clash of opposites, one in which contrastive excess violates the decorum. For Williams, pushing things beyond proportions became a vital means of artistic engagement.

Excessive figuration, although discrepant and disruptive, essentially remains a manner of discovery. As a trope, hyperbole[4] constitutes a statement that is untruthful, and whose absurdity challenges what is deemed possible and acceptable. When the shock triggered by the discord between the excess and the decorum wears

---

of his youth, an essential liberating element for the developing artist" (194). In contrast, as stressed by Lahr, Williams loathed St. Louis, which he would associate with his traumatising childhood as well as the decay of innocence, and refer notoriously as "St. Pollution" (Lahr 794).

2   Willams's duality between the body and the spirit has been the object of much critical attention. For instance, Falk pointed out that in some plays, Williams seeks to confront the Victorian repression and obsessive propriety in the South (70-71); in consequence, the carnal passion becomes "the only valid expression for life" and that the "opposite of passion is death" (76). Alice Griffin's study of *Summer and Smoke* (81-103) discusses how Alma awakens to her body, against the background of the antagonistic coupling of the spirit and the flesh. Most recently, Sigel, in his study of Williams's "metaphysics" moves away from the dichotomous uptake on the duality and suggests that the two elements should not be viewed as an exclusive duo, but as two sides of a "running dialogue" (111) which are not as segregated as they would seem.

3   This article presents some of the results of the research grant "Hyperbole in the Writings of American Southern Authors," carried out in the Institute of English Studies at the Jagiellonian University in the years 2017-2019, financed by the Polish National Science Center (OPUS 2016/23/B/HS2/01207).

4   There are surprisingly few larger studies dedicated to hyperbolic figuration. In recent years, hyperbole has most frequently been studied in the context of the grotesque aesthetics (e.g. Harpham), or Baroque literature (e.g. Johnson). Claudia Claridge's book is the only study of the hyperbole as a linguistic phenomenon.

off, a new meaning is generated. Thus, hyperbole does not aim to challenge what is deemed valid and true, nor does it seek to substitute it. A revelation through shock rather than deception remains the communicative goal of the hyperbolic mode, and the hyperbolic disruption and contrast is, ultimately, constructive. As pointed out by Johnson, "the hyperbolist uses the disruption of literal sense to communicate what could not have been otherwise communicated" (11). In this sense, Williams's artistic thought is fundamentally hyperbolic, and his artistic rules of engagement are conditioned by the hyperbolic mode and the clash of opposites pushed to the extreme.

Williams's management of the hyperbolic mode is notorious for the destruction of the characters who are subjected to the excessive, contrastive pressures. A number of his texts, such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* or *A Portrait of a Madonna*, feature a Southern belle who withers away, unable to withstand the pressures generated by an oppressive reality. Williams's texts are littered with such fastidious ladies, arguably an infamous archetype in his drama, indispensable in the portrayal of the complexities of the South, blown up out of all proportions, repressed, unable to confront their own grotesqueness and adhering to a matrix of prescriptive social rules and conventions. Williams perceived similar conflicts in his own psyche, and the "combination of Puritan and Cavalier" strains in his blood, as he admitted, "may be accountable for the conflicting impulses I often represent in the people I write about" (*Where I Live* 65). Williams's Southern belles are hungry for affection and, having been deprived of love, they wither away, gradually collapsing under the force of the social and carnal pressures at play. Williams's employment of the hyperbolic mode leads to their gradual dissolution, symbolically culminating in their forceful removal to an asylum, an institution which objectifies them and violently contains their excess. This is exactly the ultimate fate of Blanche De Bois from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Bertha from "Hello from Bertha" or Mrs Collins from *A Portrait of Madonna*.

Obviously, Williams's perception of the mental asylum was heavily informed by the incarceration of his sister Rose, who suffered from progressive schizophrenia and was placed in St Vincent's Sanitarium in 1937, and then in the State Asylum in Farmington, Missouri. According to Bak, Williams's sister remained simultaneously his artistic "muse" and "security blanket" (3). As a source of a painful sense of loss and guilt, she was also Williams's most important artistic inspiration.[5] When all pharmacological treatments brought no results, Rose was subjected to almost sixty electroshock treatments as well as one of the first prefrontal lobotomies performed in America. The invasive procedure was to alleviate the illness and end the family

5   In an article on Tennessee and Rose Williams, Michael Paller argues that the relationship between the two siblings is in fact more complex than mere artistic inspiration, and should be more likened to a "dialogue" (70). Paller suggests that upon closer scrutiny, Tennessee's relationship with his sister was much more conflicted and discordant than one would think.

ordeal of Rose's dementia, however, it only sedated Rose and rendered her artificially tranquil. Little wonder that, for Williams, the hospital would be associated with ominous oppression, danger and loss of identity.

In Williams's artistic formula, an oppressed Southern belle inevitably fades away over time. Her decay is caused by an inability to cope with the surmounting tensions, as well as an encounter with the male, carnal brute, who exposes the Southern belle's detachment and lack of balance. When exposed, the Southern belles flee, just as Blanche De Boise did before she came to her sister's doorstep—and in this way become central, fugitive figures in Williams's world. In the words of Boxill, "The faded belle and the wanderer, the has-been and the might-have-been, are elegiac characters of the 'the fugitive kind' and still-born poets whose muffled outcries are destined to oblivion the tyranny of time" (38).

For Williams, however, the fastidiousness and escapism of his fictional Southern belle is just a façade behind which repressed passions and desires are stored. Paradoxically, there is a short road from a Southern belle to a harlot, and artificial chastity can easily change into promiscuity when carnal impulses cease to be inhibited. As Williams writes of Tallulah Bankhead, an actress who famously played the role of Blanche DuBois in the 1956 revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire*: "There are certain kinds of Southern ladies who could be called tramps, if you want to use abusive language toward ladies. I suppose you could say Tallulah was a tramp, in the elegant sense. I remember she never wanted to interrupt a conversation for bodily functions" (*Memoirs* 47). The focus on the corporeal and the shattering of the rules of propriety, whether by engaging in promiscuity as a result of a lack of a proper occupation (like Blanche DuBois), or by "saying yes" to travelling salesmen to ease the aching soul (like Alma Winemiller from *Summer and Smoke*), allows Williams's characters to deconstruct the Southern decorum. The epitome of this subversion in Williams's drama are his depictions of characters who work as hustlers.

Williams's Nightingale Encounters

In his notorious *Memoirs*, Williams wrote openly and extensively about his experiences with prostitutes. In New Orleans he visited a "delightfully scandalous night spot on Bourbon Street which features the topless and bottomless go-go boys—all of whom are hustlers and some of whom are very pretty indeed" (75). Williams sought to remain cautious, when possible, giving advice to his readers: on the Bourbon Street, "boys wear G-strings only—so you can be pretty sure what you're getting. I would recommend, however, that penetration be avoided, as they are most probably all infected with clap in the ass" (75). When in Rome, Williams likewise indulged in numerous "nightingale" encounters, as he dubbed them. A "cynical" colleague of his stressed to him that there are only "two Italian phrases" he has to know "to enjoy [himself] in Rome, "Dove vai?" and "Quanto costa?" (144). Williams was far from condemnatory of prostitution, and he continued to be fascinated by how the sexual

act is redefined by a transactional context. When the body becomes an object of financial exchange, and all flirtatious games are jettisoned as redundant, the issues of desire and its fulfillment and repression are reduced to fundamentals. The cold simplicity of monetary exchange which substitutes affection, precludes ambiguities and illusory pretenses. For Williams, the sexual act in such a context is a study of human nature.

At the same time, the corporal is placed to the fore. Furthermore, if the physical and the spiritual are in a binary relationship in Williams's world, and bound in perpetual competition, the absence of one element pushes the other into a state of overdrive. Thus, for the playwright, the act of prostitution inescapably hyperbolizes the body. This disruption of equilibrium and corporeal excess necessarily taints the characters of Williams's hustlers with an insatiable longing for the spiritual. If they are nothing but excessive flesh, engaged in objectifying acts of transactional love, deep emotionality is what they crave and, tragically, exactly because of their profession, they cannot become satisfied. This is especially true in the context of how the destructive passage of time deprives them of their attractiveness, leaving them with nothing but illusory, "plastic" memories. Such a disintegrative collapse befalls a plethora of Williams's characters, three of which are discussed below in detail.

Irene's Expanding Body

The story told in "In Memory of an Aristocrat" by a budding writer-narrator is to a large extent modeled on Williams's experiences. In 1939, in New Orleans, Williams developed a keen interest in the fugitive lives of artists who struggled with the unforgiving nature of the Depression. He described them as the "most destructible element" of the society, as well as the "immature" and "rootless" people, subjected to the "worst lambasting" (*Where I Live* 13). Their raffish life in the French Quarter, dreams of creative fulfillment and their drive to paint, compose and write in spite of the dire financial situation had a particularly romantic appeal to him. Williams's *Vieux Carré*, an autobiographical play he started writing in New Orleans and finished only a few decades later, portrays the colourful human landscape of the Quarter, with the boarding house at 722 Toulouse Street populated by such individuals as the Nightingale, a predatory painter suffering from tuberculosis, or Jane, a sick society girl whose partner, Tye is a drug-addicted bouncer in a strip club.

Irene, one of the Quarter "rats," a painter forced to sustain herself with prostitution, must have had a particularly strong impact on Williams, considering how firmly her presence remains visible in his texts. In 1943, during his stay in Santa Monica, Williams wrote the poem "Mornings On Bourbon Street," in which the speaker celebrates the memory of his "companions" from the disreputable part of the French Quarter. Processing the pain of their loss, he asks rhetorically if he can still believe in love. In the long, sentimental enumeration of the images from the Bourbon street, among "pigeons and drunks," the "tall iron horseman before the Cabildo,

tipping his hat so gallantly towards old wharves" and the "rotten-sweet order the Old Quarter had," Irene appears:

> He thought of Irene whose body was offered at night
> behind the cathedral, whose outspoken pictures were hung
> outdoors, in the public square,
> as brutal as knuckles smashed into grinning faces[.] (*The Collected Poems* 72)

Likewise, in his essays, Williams writes of Irene "who painted the most powerful primitive canvases I've ever seen and whispered through shutters to men who passed on the street because she had a body that had to live" (*Where I Live* 5). Here, the playwright manages to catch the crux of the dramatic paradox of Irene's life. Her body, which she needed to maintain, became the very means she used to uphold herself. Caught in this vicious circle, Irene remains bound to her physicality, unable to realize her artistic potential. Also, the very same Irene remains a direct inspiration for Edith Jelkes in the short story *The Night of the Iguana*, which later metamorphosed into the play of the same title. The echoes of her conflicted situation are likewise discernable in the dark, promiscuous past Blanche De Boise seeks to escape from, and which Stanley reveals to Mitch, to her detriment.

The narrator of "In Memory of an Aristocrat" develops an anecdotal narrative of how together with Carl, a mediocre fiddler and occasional robber, he would occasionally visit Irene, a painter who in her "crib-like" (89) room, deep in the French Quarter, resorted to prostitution to support herself. Irene is a Willamesque paradox, an artist-harlot, combining two opposing drives: the corporeal and the spiritual. In her, they permeate each other on a fundamental level, and even during sex, she would become inspired and envision artistic designs, interrupting the intercourse to set them down. With this convolution, Irene's body is physically out of balance. She seems asymmetrical and especially the lower part of her body is disproportionately spacious—in the words of the narrator, "everything about her was on a monumental scale" (91). In spite of this irregularity, she was in no way "unpleasant to look at" (91) and exuded a sense of nobility, indicating that she had confronted the adversities of her life with bravery. With her past upon her, it seemed that her potential for fulfillment was curtailed: "There was nearly always an air of quiet laughter about her, together with something that was deeply, incurably hurt" (91). As with all of Williams's lonesome characters, she lived accompanied by auguries of the disaster which would befall her.

For the narrator, Irene's deep artistic intensity would be more connotative of florid poetry than of prolix prose. She painted with "force and precision" (95) that only comes with the "fury of first-rate talent" (95) and the accurate strokes of her brush connoted the potent expressive power of figurative speech. This deep sensitivity and fractious ingenuity generated an insoluble paradox in Irene—"the more I feel" she confessed "the more I am capable of feeling" (95). She was caught in the self-

perpetuating vortex of affection, which gradually escalated, pushing her to the point of overdrive. So, her fear was that she would eventually turn into an emotional excess and become consumed by the uncontrollable surplus—what actually happens at the end of the story. Her uncontrollability, as if she was "possessed of a demon" (96), was ultimately of destructive nature. For Irene, this drive was also economically perilous in so far as, if she were to lose herself in her emotions, it could render her unable to objectify her body and maintain the profession that enabled her to earn her daily bread.

In his *Memoirs*, Williams used a similar image of emotional surplus that cannot be contained to talk about Blanche: "She was a demonic creature, the size of her feeling was too great for her to contain without the escape of madness" (55). The striking correspondence of these two characteristics, and even the use of the same words, not only points to Irene as a trial run for Blanche, but also exemplifies how Williams's thought was governed by a similar figurative conceptualization of excess. Both women remain in an essential conflict with themselves, as their bodies cannot figuratively contain the convoluted emotional content of their hearts and their "demonic" uncontrollability. Thus, as is the case with Irene, the body has to expand or, as is the case with Blanche, it has to become the object of dominative violence and be exiled into an asylum.

The manner in which Carl and Irene make up after an argument, with loud sex, full of "gasping, moans, smothered darlings" and "hoarse, rapid breathing" (93-94), is reminiscent of how satisfying intercourse became a bridge of understanding between Stella and Stanley and allowed them to make up after a fight. Irene's sexuality is as unrestrained as Stella's, while her emotional malady is as pervasive as Blanche's. And, so, the metaphorical container of the body cannot accommodate the emotional excess of the two drives which pushes upon it from within. When Irene wanted to "embrace the whole world" (97), she wanted her body to follow the excessive growth of her inner, spiritual side, which was suppressed by financial limitations as well as her confinement to the small cell-like apartment in the French Quarter. Thus her body is unruly in the sense of its limitlessness, but at the same time, she is aware of how her profession restrains her socially. Irene admits she is "fed up with being a whore" (98) and would like to put "scatological sketches" on other people's walls (98). However, when she submits her paintings for an exhibition, they are rejected because of her notorious reputation and the fact that she supports herself by means of prostitution.

So, when her artistic vision is rejected and the "aristocratic" privilege of a Bohemian painter is lost, she eventually collapses into violent excess and throws a tantrum, hitting one of her critics with her painting. She rebels against her status as a pariah, and against the condemnation and downfall that she knew would await her, in contrast to the naïve foretelling of the African-American woman at the beginning of the story. Her face becomes "livid" (101), when the suppressed, demonic energy erupts and the club ladies fruitlessly seek to contain her, even though "nothing on earth could stop her, not even the Maginot line" (101). In the

midst of a fight, she seems to expand again, her dress is torn and one of her breasts is revealed, symbolically expressing her bolstering physicality, hidden by the temporary entourage of propriety. The unmanageable violence of her ire overpowers all those who try to oppose her: "Millions of voices seemed to shout together, but over them was always her voice" (101). Thus Irene is blown up beyond all proportions, turned into excess, changed into uncontrollable, hyperbolic force that towers over everyone else and seeks to rebel violently against the constraints that curtail her.

Bertha's Body in Decay

Bertha, from the short drama "Hello from Bertha," is another hustler with a disorderly, excessive body. Unlike Irene or Oliver, her physicality neither expands, nor is imprisoned in an imperfect perfection—in this text, the "body for sale" is subjected to atrophy and forcefully exiled. Also, contrary to previous plays, "Hello from Bertha" is not set in New Orleans's French Quarter, but in the "valley," the red-light district of St Louis, the town the playwright moved to with his parents at the age of nine, following Cornelius Williams's promotion at the International Shoe Company.

The play opens with a powerful image of inertia. In a brothel located in the "valley," Bertha, a despondent, middle-aged, blonde prostitute is lying prostate in her bed, unable to move. She is suffering from an ailment that is not named, but there is little doubt she will soon pass away. The very first line of the play, the question Goldie, the manager of the brothel, directs at her: "Bertha, what are you going to do?" (171) is not actually a question but an attempt at forcing the sick hustler to realize that she has no future. Its fatalistic undertone is reminiscent of the question that plagues Amanda in *Glass Menagerie*: "So what are we going to do the rest of our lives? Stay home and watch the parades go by?" (18). Like a number of Williams's Southern belles and harlots, Bertha is doomed, and what the playwright documents in the drama is her harrowing swansong.

Goldie's business suffers from Bertha's inertia and her unproductive occupation of one of the rooms—as she explains, the "girls" need the space she is staying in for their clients. Prior to her intervention, she allowed Bertha to stay bed-ridden for two weeks, waiting for her to recover, but the wait has turned into a wake. Bertha's sickness immobilised her and drained her of energy, as her body is dissolving under the pressure of heartache and advancing depression. She cannot move or undertake any constructive action and in response to Goldie's questions and reassurances, she moans and tosses around in bed, like a wounded animal trapped in a snare. Bertha deflects her manager's questions, repeats her obscure, laconic retorts and zones out, moving back and forth in a diseased delirium.

The mournful inertia she suffers from is both fatal and debilitating, and it adumbrates no recovery, meliorism or control. Goldie proposes summoning a priest and a doctor for Bertha, but the dying prostitute refuses to see either. Neither her body nor her soul can be remedied, since the source of her excessive, feverish atrophy

is very deeply rooted—she is haunted by the memory of her former love, Charlie, a hardware seller from Memphis, with whom she had a passionate affair at the "back room" of his store. Bertha keeps slapping the bed and her voice transforms into a "sobbing mumble," whenever she desperately calls out for her "Sweet Charlie" (173). The memory of her former lover is a source of pain to her, but also, the only anchor for her mind, which becomes focused solely on his image.

But for all her grief and anguish, Bertha remains proud, clinging to the dignity of dying and the nobility of love. While her profession entailed her sleeping with numberless men, and the objectification of her body, her heart remains sentimentally dedicated to Charlie. Williams seems respectful of that devotion. Bertha's painful exclamation, "I love you so much it makes my guts ache to look at your blessed face in the picture!" (178) stresses his absence and the aridness of her love. The only thing she is left with is a picture of Charlie, which she worships like an icon—other than that, she is bankrupt, diseased and forlorn. Devoid of any kind of leverage, the sole resource she possessed, her body which she was selling away in the brothel can no longer support her, both figuratively and literally. Bertha's physical inertia translates into how barren and useless her body has become. When she shouts out hysterically to the non-present Charlie, lying in bed in a "catatonic state" (177), it is an outburst of desperation, an exorbitant spasm prophesies her impending departure.

Bertha dissolves and fades away in the eyes of the audience. At the end of the play, Goldie summons an ambulance which takes her dying colleague to a hospital, where she would be put into a "nice, clean ward" (179). This removal is symptomatic of Williams's representation of the loss of identity and the mental malady he once observed in his sister. The heartbroken prostitute is objectified and exiled from the brothel as an unfitting element which cannot be put to any use, and which disturbs the decorum. The hyperbolic pressures have rendered Bertha unseemly and out of place, and as an excessive, awkward pariah she has to be evicted, and her dissolution as a person becomes tantamount to her death. Just like Miss Collins in *Portrait of Madonna*, Bertha plans to leave a farewell letter to her old lover. In her final words, she dictates the note to Lena, another fellow prostitute, who only pretends to set it down. This goodbye note, a sad testament to her life is never to actually be written down, let alone delivered to the addressee. In the letter, Bertha declares that she is sane, calls for Charlie to come over and bail her out for "old time's sake" and signs the message as "old sweetheart, Bertha" (180).

The removal to the asylum and the unwritten letter are the final markers of Bertha's entropy. She dissolves under the hyperbolic pressure of her sentimental love for Charlie, contrasted with her profession, in which, instead of romantic involvement, there was a pecuniary exchange of the body for money. This pressure is further aggravated by the sense of loss, for Bertha realizes that, given her condition, she has no hope of being reunited with Charlie, or even making him remember her. Thus, she breaks and the collapse of her body and her physical removal from her room in the brothel augurs her complete dissolution and death.

Oliver's Statuesque Body

While Irene's physicality expands into a boundless excess, the body of Oliver Winemiller from "One Arm" remains fixed in a state of serene stasis. In the story, he was one of three male hustlers who could be found in the winter of 1939 on a certain corner of Canal Street in New Orleans. This "unforgettable youth" (196), a former light heavyweight champion boxer of the Pacific fleet who had lost an arm in a car accident, looked like a "broken statue of Apollo" and percolated the "coolness and impassivity of a stone figure" (196). While other two male prostitutes would energetically seek to solicit clients, Oliver remained motionless and speechless, waiting to be spoken to. His statuesque impassivity remained undisturbed, regardless of the weather, and in rain his drenched clothes "held to his body as smooth as the clothes of sculpture" (197). Visibly, Williams designs the narrative to stress the narrator's infatuation with Oliver. The text is permeated with delicate, but visibly obsessive references to his body, and the density of the description iconically represents the extent to which Oliver's physicality remains an aesthetic object of compulsive fascination. Just as it is stressed by Michael Hooper, in the 1940s Williams employed the short story to encapsulate the powerful impact the newly discovered "gay underworld" exerted on him and "made them compelling material upon which to draw" (Hooper 97).

Olivier's body is defined by its brokenness, and the eponymous synecdochical arm. Much as he resembles a Greek sculpture, and much as his physique exudes aesthetic perfection, the form of his body was effectively ruined by the car accident. The mutilation corrupted carnal perfection, turning it into imperfection, deconstructing the classical decorum of his body, obstructing its balance and proportion. Thus, the hyperbolic paradox of Oliver's body is that the potency for perfection is encased in an imperfect form, setting the contrastive ideas of aesthetic wholeness and deficiency against each other.[6]

As with other mutilated characters of Williams's fiction, the brokenness of Oliver's body also represents the scars in his mind. In another text, *The Mutilated*, Trinket distances herself from love and passion to hide the fact that she has had a mastectomy, and she remains starved of a love which she denies herself. A similar self-revulsion drives Oliver to objectify his body, drain it out of passion and sell it in Canal Street. He seeks to escape from his broken form and his incompleteness. In this sense, the accident turns Oliver into a fugitive grotesque, both on the inside and the outside and his passive and statuesque exterior hides the extent of his post-traumatic malady. The tragic loss of an arm reached deep, right into the "center of his being," spawning a new "speechless self" within him, faster "than it took new skin to cover the stump of the arm he had lost" (197). This second, newborn identity briskly began

6   Brian M. Peter attaches vital significance to the figurative framework of "One Arm" (as well as "Desire and the Black Masseur"), and its paradoxes. To him, Williams's language "reflects the impact of society's often limiting approach to non-conventional romantic options" (109).

to "look about for destruction" (197), pushing him to take on prostitution, to become restless and emotionally detached, and ultimately, to murder a wealthy client who wanted him to take part in a blue movie.

The metaphor of a motionless and emotionless statue is central to Williams's representation of Oliver's body. Similarly, the transactions he engages in are formal, repetitive and devoid of passion, as if his clients were buying a ticket to see a piece at an art gallery. This excessive lack of emotionality and hyperbolic reduction of the body to a soulless, artistic object generates an emotional void which becomes filled when, in the death ward, Oliver receives an avalanche of love letters from his old clients. Not only is the content of these letters deeply emotional, but also, as they are written on fine, white paper and faintly scented, their material form connotes sensuality. The messages expressed their distress upon the news of Oliver's pending execution, and stressed that the time they spent together haunted their minds, due to the a mixture of the charm of the defeated combined with youth and physical charm. As a person awaiting the death penalty, Oliver "had for these correspondents the curtailed and abstract quality of the priest who listens without being visible to confessions of guilt" (200). He is a perfect object of reverence for his former clients—he knows their dark, promiscuous secrets, and they feel they have the obscure right to confide in him. At the same time, he remains inaccessible, first as an incarcerated inmate, second, a man with a pending death sentence, and, in a sense, remains a safe emotional investment, a phantom partner who cannot hurt them. In this sense, Oliver will take his clients' confessional expressions of love to his grave.

The transactions that took place on the corner of Canal Street, in which Oliver's clients paid him for his body, are fundamentally subversive in so far as they received almost the opposite of what they paid for. Oliver's clients gave him money for intercourse without passion, aimed solely at carnal gratification. What they received in return for their payment, however, was a life-changing event that divulged for them a haunting passion and love. In this sense, Olivier's excessive emotional detachment, brokenness and self-loathing created a space in which his clients could fill themselves completely and in which, paradoxically, his statuesque indifference was a catalyst for romantic love and sensual longing.

Conclusions

The three images of "bodies for sale" discussed in the article, Irene's corporal expanse, Oliver's statuesque brokenness and Bertha's inert atrophy, share a common figurative denominator. They are ostensibly hyperbolic due to the overwhelming compulsion for the corporeal they entail, and the persistent focus on the body that is positioned and typified in different excessive manners. In fact, the overall representation of prostitutes one finds in Williams's plays, short stories and poems steadily revolves around figurative excess. Such an aesthetic mode, which consisted of blowing things out of all proportion, disturbing the decorum and juxtaposing the opposites, was

more than fitting for Williams to represent the discordant nature of trading with sex, in which the carnal seeks to suppress the spiritual.

At the same time, ostensibly, prostitution was not immoral for Williams. In his portrayal of Irene, Oliver and Bertha, one can sense a great deal of positive sentiment or even deference for their struggle. This cannot be interpreted merely as the author's nostalgia of his promiscuous adventures—in his writings, Williams had acknowledged the complexity of the harlots' emotional and physical predicament. And, as a true artist, he used it to study human behavior, to understand the impulses that govern the heart and to peek into the carnal side of human nature, as well as the deep longing for love and passion that all people share. In fact this is the very thing which became William's artistic signature.

Works Cited

Bak, Johnson S. *Tennessee Williams: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Print.

Boxill, Roger. *Modern Dramatists: Tennessee Williams*. New York: Macmillan Education, 1987. Print.

Claridge, Claudia. *Hyperbole in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print.

Falk, Sigini. *Tennessee Williams*. New York: Twyne, 1961. Print.

Griffin, Alice. *Understanding Tennessee Williams*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995. Print.

Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Print.

Holditch, Kenneth D. "Tennessee Williams in New Orleans." *Magical Muse: Millennial Essays on Tennessee Williams*. Ed. Ralph F. Voss. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002. 193-206. Print.

Hooper, Michael S. D. *Sexual Politics in the Work of Tennessee Williams: Desire Over Protest*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

Johnson, Christopher D. 2010. *Hyperboles: The Rhetoric of Excess in Baroque Literature and Thought*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. Print.

Lahr, John. *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh*. New York: Northon, 2014. Print.

Paller, Michael. "The Escape That Failed—Tennessee and Rose Williams." *Magical Muse: Millennial Essays on Tennessee Williams*. Ed. Ralph F. Voss. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 202. 70-91. Print.

Peter, Brain M. "Queer Semiotics of Expression: Gothic Language and Homosexual Destruction in Tennessee Williams's 'One Arm' and 'Desire and the Black Masseur.'" *Tennessee Williams Annual Review* 8 (2006). 109–121. Print.

Saddik, Aneette. *Tennessee Williams and the Theatre of Excess: The Strange, the Crazed, the Queer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Print

Siegel, Robert. "The Metaphysics of Tennessee Williams." *Magical Muse: Millennial Essays on Tennessee Williams*. Ed. Ralph F. Voss. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press 2002. 111-131. Print.

Williams, Tennessee. "Hello from Bertha." *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. New York: New Directions, 1966. 169-181. Print.

——. "In Memory of an Aristocrat." *Collected Stories*. London: Vintage Books, 1966. 88-104. Print.

——. "One Arm." *Collected Stories*. London: Vintage Books, 1966. 196-212. Print

——. *The Glass Menagerie*. New York: New Directions, 1999. Print.

——. *The Collected Poems of Tennessee Williams*. Ed. David Rossel. New York: New Directions, 2002. Print.

——. *Memoirs*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 2006. Print

——. *Where I Live: Selected Essays*. Ed. John. S. Bak. New York: New Directions Publishing, 2009. Print.

Elżbieta Rokosz-Piejko

Adapting, Remaking, Re-visioning:
Alex Haley's *Roots* in a Triangular Relationship
with Its Two Television Adaptations

Abstract: The 1977 television adaptation of Alex Haley's family saga was an overwhelming (although rather unexpected) success, both in the United States and abroad. The 8-hour miniseries, aired first by the History Channel on Memorial Day 2016, is a new take on the adaptation of Haley's text, advertised as a remake of the 1977 production. The article refers to the original success of Haley's text, followed by numerous controversies, and then discusses the appropriation of the story for the 1977 mostly white television audience, to finish up with a discussion of the angle which the 2016 production took, engaging in dialogue with the "iconic" 1977 miniseries.

Keywords: *Roots,* Alex Haley, adaptation, television miniseries, remake

In the history of literature there are a number of works that have turned out to have an immense social and cultural impact, far exceeding the highest hopes of their authors. Alex Haley's 1976 book titled *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* is, undoubtedly, one of them, despite the controversies that surround it now. Those controversies concern the basic idea of truth: the book was published, advertised and sold as being based on facts; this is what supposedly distinguished it from other publications taking up the subject of slavery.[1] Haley called his work an example of "faction"—written in the form of a novel, but being the history of his family, one of its branches, traced down the genealogical tree back to his African ancestor, captured in the Gambia in the second half of the eighteenth century and sold into slavery in the British colony of Maryland. The germ of the story was found in the history preserved in his family's oral tradition, passed from generation to generation, until Haley himself found the determination to pursue his research and explore both the American and the African elements of the story, which, as he claimed, had taken him twelve years.[2] The veracity of the results of that research is, however, questionable.

---

1   See, e.g. Boyd; Crouch; or Reid.

2   One of the sources providing detailed information about the creation of both the book and the serial is the Warner Bros 2007 documentary *Crossing Over: How Roots Captivated an Entire Nation.*

Haley started the project in the 1960s, which coincided with his collaboration with Malcolm X culminating in the posthumous publication of the activist's autobiography. That fact seems to explain Haley's apparent urge to both find and cherish his African roots within the universal African-American context, and to confirm the Islamic heritage of the people of Africa (Kunta Kinte, the African ancestor whose birthplace Haley claimed to have finally discovered came from the Islamic part of Africa). In the mid-70s, when Haley's book finally saw the light of day, it became caught up within the post-Civil-Rights atmosphere, but it was still before its completion that the book gained enough fame to be contracted for a television miniseries. As Haley was finishing his text, page by page, so were four screenwriters completing the adapted screenplay, all of them white.[3] The book was published in August 1976,[4] when the miniseries was already in production. The serial was shown by ABC television starting January 23, 1977, for eight consecutive nights, as the producers feared it might not attract too many viewers. The results were astonishing—more than half of the nation watched the production, breaking all possible records and leading to daily routines and special events being rescheduled (cf. *Crossing Over*).

The consequences of this popularity—particularly of its scale—were unprecedented and unexpected. One of them was an outburst of interest in genealogy amongst Americans of various origins. Letters to the National Archives in Washington, requesting information on people's genealogies tripled, applications for permits to use the facilities doubled. Knowing one's lineage became an urge not only for African Americans, but equally so for the descendants of immigrants. Thousands of people searched for their roots, encouraged by Haley's example.[5] Another immediate consequence was the striking popularity of Alex Haley himself. In 1977 he received the Pulitzer Prize, became a celebrity giving dozens of lectures and interviews, and had a number of places and public institutions named in his honor.

However, with the growing popularity of Haley's family history accusations appeared, the first and most serious of which concerned plagiarism. There were also

---

3   As William Haley, Alex's son, suggests in the documentary *Crossing Over*, the fact that no African American screenwriter was involved in the process resulted in the miniseries being "not as hard hitting as it could have been." In the same documentary material David L. Wolper, the miniseries executive producer, claims, that it was Alex Haley's decision not to get any other African American writer but him be involved in writing the screenplay. According to him, Haley said: "I'm afraid that if a black writer is associated with this show, he's gonna give his point of view of how this should be. I don't want his point of view, I want my point of view."

4   However, as we can read in the 1976 edition of *Roots:* "A condensed version of a portion of this work first appeared in *Reader's Digest*" in 1974.

5   We can find reference to the interest Americans took in genealogy, inspired by the Haley family history, in a number of sources, including Gardner 152-153; Manley; and the documentary *Crossing Over.*

questions about the general veracity of the pre-Civil War segment of the family history. There were two separate court cases in the spring of 1977, in which the plaintiffs claimed Haley had plagiarized their novels. The first one, settled to the plaintiff's advantage, concerned the main character, Kunta Kinte, and numerous passages, which were, as Haley eventually was forced to acknowledge, taken from *The African*, a 1967 novel authored by the plaintiff, white author Hal Courlander. Courlander and Haley settled the case for $650,000 and a statement that "Alex Haley acknowledges and regrets that various materials from *The African* by Harold Courlander found their way into his book, *Roots*" (qtd. in Kaplan). The second case, brought by Margaret Walker, an African American writer, claiming that Haley plagiarized her 1966 novel *Jubilee*, was dismissed as unsubstantiated. The fact of plagiarism was not publicized, the Pulitzer Prize was not revoked. Judge Robert Ward, who presided over the Courlander case, says in the 1996 BBC documentary *The Roots of Alex Haley*: "Alex Haley perpetrated a hoax on the public." That hoax, however, was to be fully revealed years later.

Haley's book became of immediate interest to historians and genealogists. Those who too enough effort, e.g. Gary and Elizabeth Mills, found out that the pre-Civil War part of the book was a hoax,[6] and so was the very tracing of Kunta Kinte and locating him in the village of Juffure, the Gambia. The Mills' article from 1981 and a number of other articles from the 1990s, published after Haley's death in 1992, provide evidence for the falsity of Haley's claims (cf. Crouch; Reid). The most accusatory was Phillip Nobile's article "Alex Haley's Hoax," which appeared in *The Village Voice* on February 23, 1993. Nobile gained access to the repository for Alex Haley's papers, located at the University of Tennessee Special Collections Library, Knoxville. His findings were published in the abovementioned article and were also turned into the BBC documentary referred to above, directed by James Kent, never broadcast in the United States. They prove both the plagiarism and the lack of reliable evidence for the pre-Civil War period of the family history, and of the African part in particular. It appears that the Kunta Kinte of Juffure, the Gambia never existed. Or at least not the one supposedly brought to America in 1767 to become Alex Haley's ancestor.

No matter what the revelations concerning the actual authenticity of the Haley family history are, Kunta Kinte has become part of the American historical narrative as an archetype of an African ancestor every African American has in his or her genealogy: a warrior, a free man enslaved, struggling to maintain his identity and dignity, and to pass the knowledge about the African ancestors onto the next generations. Whoever Haley's actual African ancestor was, he did stay in people's memory, because what started Haley's research were a few African-sounding words

---

6   Until 1870 the federal census listed most blacks by age and sex, not by name, which renders most research into African-American family history basically ineffective. The Mills prove that the conclusions Haley jumped to about his pre-Civil War ancestors were wrong.

that had survived in the family oral tradition, coming from "the African," the ancestor brought from Africa and enslaved.

Kunta Kinte became an archetype of an African slave for millions of viewers outside the US, as the series sold remarkably well abroad: for the viewers, much more than the readers, because it was the miniseries rather than Haley's text itself that conquered the world and inscribed the name of Kunta Kinte in the memory of all those who watched it. The fact that the story itself is actually made up is of little importance from the global perspective—even if the character is fictitious and has no connection whatsoever with Alex Haley's family, the urtext is true. There were millions of Africans caught and sold into slavery who were abused, mutilated, exploited. *Roots* one way or another tells their story. However, if not based on facts, Alex Haley's *Roots* is just a novel and should not have been advertised as nonfiction. As the court case proved, in that supposedly nonfiction book there were 80 passages plagiarized from a novel. However, as the *New York Times* editorial team wrote after Haley's death: "Whatever its flaws, *Roots* opened modern America's eyes to [its] black heritage… its impact was phenomenal" (qtd. in Henig 60).

It seems that the popularity of Haley's narrative in the 1970s, whether the book or the miniseries, grew out of a number of factors, two of which are the skilful fictionalization of family history, thanks to which we get access to Haley's ancestors' feelings and emotions, and the informative function it played, "teaching" thousands of readers about slave trade and the horrors of slavery in general. That "lesson," however, turned out to be partly misleading, as some researchers have proved, with reference to both African culture and tradition, and slave ships' practices.

The 1977 miniseries was made and broadcast within certain social constraints. As Matthew F. Delmont puts it in *Making Roots: A Nation Captivated*, "the series had to appeal to white viewers in order to be a commercial success" (109), as the white audience constituted a majority of the television programs recipients. The series had to have "white television names" and some of the white characters foregrounded. Nevertheless, it managed to "rework blackness" and skillfully negotiate "the challenges posed by remembering slavery in a (white) nation that would rather not talk about it" (King and Leonard 120). Some of the white characters were softened, the cast was selected carefully to include recognizable faces (e.g., Lorne Hyman Greene, Maya Angelou, O.J. Simpson, Kevin Joseph Aloysius "Chuck" Connors, George Stevens Hamilton). There were also a number of alterations introduced, which led to the partial substitution of white for black perspectives on the African past (there are some scenes in which the point of view is that of a white character, e.g. captain Davies who has the slave ship under his command). However, most of the story is evidently told from the perspective of African American characters, who are all positive, while most of whites are unquestionable villains. For the first time, in a major television show addressed to the wide audience, whiteness was decentered and African American characters appeared as fully human. And for the first time in a production like this, the fact of white slave masters raping their female slaves and having children

by them is conspicuously referred to, stressing that in American history "whiteness and blackness are inextricably linked" (Gardner 152).

Roots still remains of interest to scholars, as reflected by a recent publication *Reconsidering Roots: Race, Politics, and Memory*, edited by Erica L. Ball and Kellie Carter Jackson (2017), including essays which readdress the impact of Haley's book and of the 1977 miniseries. In their introduction, the editors quote Matthew Frye Jacobson's opinion concerning the global popularity of the television production: "*Roots* was rather nimbly appropriated as a generic saga of migration and assimilation, not an African-American story, not even an American story, exactly, but a modern one—a story that 'speaks for all of us everywhere'" (qtd. in Ball and Jackson 7). In his essays published *Reader's Digest* in 1977, Haley stressed the universal immigrant story inscribed in the narrative (7). Because of this universal dimension the series was a subject of serious criticism—for turning African Americans into an ethnic group as any others. The leftists criticized both the book and the series for privileging faith and family (Haley was a Republican, after all), and for making slavery look more benign than it actually was. The miniseries, even more than the book, stressed the similarities between Kunta Kinte's story, or the stories of his descendants trying to survive against all odds, and immigrant narratives. From such a perspective, Kunta Kinte does resemble an immigrant who struggles to save pieces of the "old world" and becomes a character that Americans of all ethnicities can identify with. As Richard King notices in his article on African Americans on television, "*Roots* may have marked the first time many whites had been able to identify with blacks as people" (74). Very strong criticism concerned also the introductory text delivered in the form of voice-over, advertising the production and explaining its origins as follows: "From primitive Africa to the Old South, *Roots* sweeps across a young America bursting with all the dreams, all the joys, and all the hardships of a vibrant country and its people, through the years of slavery, the Civil War, reconstruction and struggle to survive" (*Roots* 1977). Such an opening, besides depreciating African culture and civilization, stressed the universal, that is American, nature of the narrative, which in a way is also foregrounded by Haley himself in the subtitle of the book: *The Saga of an American Family.*

As Ball and Jackson notice, *Roots* and its 1977 adaptation served as a popular metaphor for the legislative gains of the Civil Rights Movement and a promise of a better tomorrow and led to "reading *Roots* as a post-civil-rights parable" (6). However, it did "hold under erasure important historical elements" (King and Leonard 120). This is precisely what the new television adaptation of *Roots*, broadcast in 2016 does not do—quite the opposite, it exposes such elements, just as a History Channel production should.

The 2016 8-hour production was advertised as "[t]he groundbreaking series reimagined" and its first episode was aired on Memorial Day 2016. The reason for its creation, stated in the advertising campaign, was, first of all, the urge to revive the "cultural icon for a new audience" (Dirk Hoostra qtd. in Andreeva), since "[t]here is a whole generation of Americans who don't know the story, don't have a connection

to *Roots*" (LeVar Burton qtd. in Guthrie). A relatively rare solution in adaptations of literary texts, the 2016 miniseries instead of trying to readapt the source text, re-makes the first adaptation and remains in a constant dialogue with it, rather than with Haley's text. The explanation for such an approach can be twofold; first of all, the 1977 series is much better known to the contemporary television audience than the book, and it is more captivating and dynamic as a narrative, too. Besides, unlike Haley's book, it is not burdened with the accusation of being a hoax.

The new audio-visual text is more dramatic, more violent, more visually attractive and more historically contextualized. However, its social impact cannot be—and, admittedly, nobody ever believed it could be—comparable to that of the 1977 miniseries, as the televisual landscape makes it just one production among many, its advertising was moderate, and the subject matter instead of being surprising or novel rather fits into the vogue for historical productions set in the slavery period (to name as the most conspicuous the examples of *Django Unchained* (2012), *12 Years a Slave* (2013), a new TV series *Underground* (2016), or the feature film *The Birth of a Nation* (2016) showing Nat Turner's uprising). The political context of the 2016 production, seemingly entirely different from that of the 1977 original, is not exactly so, due to the continued systemic racism towards people of color and relatively recent demonstrations against it, e.g. Black Lives Matter activist movement.

As Thomas Leitch points out, the remake, the original film it remakes and the source text of the two audio-visual texts establish a peculiar "triangular relationship" (39). As he also suggests, remakes usually intend to revise the original films, while evoking the memory of the earlier productions with all the positive associations the audience might still have. This is precisely what the 2016 miniseries does—while paying homage to the original production it provides Haley's narrative with a richer historical context and a more accusatory tone. Addressed to an audience much less sensitive to violence and cruelty on screen than in 1977, it was advertised as more violent than its predecessor: the characters are more brutal, the whippings are longer, sexual violence is more explicit. Each episode is preceded by a warning: "The following historical presentation contains intense language of the time period and violence," and the viewing guides available on the History Channel webpage contain a similar message: "Please note that ROOTS contains intense language of the time period, violence and sexual violence and therefore we do not recommend it for children under the age of 14. Viewer discretion is strongly advised."

Similarly to that of the 1977 production, the cast of the 2016 adaptation includes a number of well-known actors (e.g. Forest Whitaker, Anna Paquin, Laurence Fishburne, Johnathan Rhys Meyers, Matthew Goode) and introduces new faces as well (e.g. Malachi Kirby, an English actor of Jamaican ancestry, as Kunta Kinte). LeVar Burton, the actor who played young Kunta Kinte in the original miniseries, became one of the executive producers of the new production and played a major role in the advertising campaign of the new series, creating a natural connection between the old and the new verson.

Just like the source text and the first adaptation, the new miniseries starts with Kunta Kinte's youth in Juffure in West Africa, in Mandinka Kingdom, the Gambia. Haley's story romanticized and rehabilitated Africa, picturing it as an Eden, and so did the first adaptation. Back in 1977 the picture of Africa as a place populated by people with strong family ties, a clear system of values, not "wild beasts," was a new and valuable contribution. The 2016 production goes a step further: Juffure is not a simple village (as Haley and the original miniseries depicted it), but a vibrant urban community, and Kunta is planning his studies in Timbuktu before being abducted. The producers stressed that the recreated African setting is much richer in the 2016 series due to the enhanced knowledge of African history that is now available. Kunta's life is, however, more troubled due to the conflict between his tribe, the Mandinka, and the Koros, another tribe, the members of which eventually capture Kunta and sell him to the white slave traders. The tribes are presented as much more militant and Kunta's warrior training is more violent; the general atmosphere of the African part of the story is transformed, with pastoral overtones replaced by much more complex and ambivalent ones.

The softening of white characters introduced in the 1977 adaptation is not to be observed in the 2016 series, which also returns to the original names of the white masters depicted in Haley's book and the two adaptations, the names changed in the 1977 production: Reynolds, Moore, and Harvey become Waller, Lea, and Murray, as in Haley's narrative. The Waller brothers are depicted as far more vicious and racist than in the original series and the entire sub-plot from the 1977 series involving the moral dilemma of Captain Davies regarding his command of a slave ship disappears in the remake. In the 2016 production, the captain participates in slave trade and takes advantage of the female slaves on-board his ship, which the 1977 captain refrained from.

If the education of the audience of the 1977 production concerned mainly sympathy and empathy for the African American protagonists, the 2016 version tries to provide a more powerful and accurate history lesson.[7] In the aftermath of the television broadcast of the 1977 production, "more than 250 colleges and universities began offering courses on *Roots* and the history of slavery" (Maranzani). The new production, anticipating potential interest, is accompanied by additional materials available on-line, to supplement those potential viewers in need of further historical background or subject for discussion.[8] It is overtly didactic, aspiring to be viewed as an audio-visual history lesson. Hence, among the elements that distinguish it

---

7   The insistence on accuracy can, however, lead to quite surprising declarations, as it is in the case of Marisa Guthrie's statement beginning her 2016 article on the new series for *The Hollywood Reporter*. She states that "a more violent and a more accurate remake is here," which without further explanation sounds as if a modified copy, which a remake as such is, could be actually more accurate than the original.

8   A variety of viewing guides can be found at http://www.history.com/roots-viewing-resources.

from both the source text and the first adaptation is the abovementioned very clear historical context and involvement of the protagonists in key historical events taking place between 1767, when Kunta arrives in America, and the end of the Civil War, when the televisual narrative ends. Both series refer similarly to only one historical event, i.e. Nat Turner's rebellion and the impact it has on the protagonists' lot, while major modifications introduced in the process of the historical contextualizing of the remake concern the events of the American Revolution, the abolitionist movement and the Civil War.

The American Revolution becomes part of Kunta Kinte's story, because as a runaway slave he is shown as encouraged to join the British troops and promised freedom when the American cause is lost. He joins the weaponless Ethiopian regiment of Lord Dunmore, but escapes from the battle, in the fog, witnessing his friend's death; he is captured with the British papers stating the right of slaves to be free and, as a punishment, part of his foot is cut off before his return to his master. The abolitionist movement is represented in the last episode by Nancy, a white lady, the fiancée of Fredrick Murray, one of the slaveholders, who turns out to be a Union spy. When her true intentions are discovered, she is hanged and so is Jerusalem, her slave associate. In the same episode, covering the period of the Civil War, Chicken George, Kunta Kinte's grandson, joins the Union Army, and through his first-hand experience the viewers learn about the role of African American soldiers in the conflict, as well as about the treatment they received when captured by the Confederates. After the battle at Fort Pillow, Chicken George witnesses the massacre of the black soldiers who, according to the Southern standards, did not have the rights of POWs and were simply slaughtered.

All of the abovementioned scenes and events are new to the story, introduced by the screenwriters.[9] These additions serve a number of purposes—they not only provide a general lesson in American history, but by the inclusion of African Americans in the events they stress the part slaves, or former slaves, played or could have played in that history. The broader historical context becomes the main feature which distinguishes the remake from the original series, besides the general high visual quality of the picture and more violence shown.

As Forest and Koos notice, remakes "reflect different historical, economic, social, political and aesthetic conditions that made them possible" (3). Informative, violent, dramatic, consistent aesthetically, the new series has been quite well received by the critics, but did not lead to any major debate. It is significant that its reviewers referred to the 1977 series, not Haley's book, as the source text it should be compared with. They stressed not so much the narrative or visual qualities of the production, but concentrated on the different times in which it "landed" as "one story among many" (the quoted phrases come from Poniewozik's review for *The New York Times*,

---

9   Unlike the original miniseries, the group of screenwriters of the 2016 production included, besides Lawrence Konner and Mark David Rosenthal, two African American writers: Alison McDonald and Charles Murray.

but a similar stand is represented by D'Addario or McGuiness). Does the new series have anything to say to its viewers that they do not know yet? Probably not. Was it, then, worth the effort? What it certainly achieved, was bringing back the memory of the original miniseries, and with the full awareness of the cult that still surrounds it and the sensitive territory the critique of Haley's novel is, restoring it into the contemporary media discourse and circulation. It also evoked in the original audience of the 1977 miniseries' the nostalgia for the times when a television drama could unite the audience nation-wide in the common experience of participation in what turned out to be television history making. As Poniewozik rightly points it out in his review: "A generation of viewers—whatever we looked like, wherever we came from, wherever we ended up—carried the memory of Kunta having his name beaten out of him."

The 1977 *Roots* was "the right story" in "the right form" at "the right time," as back then Barbara Jordan, a Texas Congresswoman, told the *Time* magazine (qtd. in Rothman). In this particular case of the "triangular relationship," to use Leitch's term again, paradoxically it is not the remake that dominates and "marginalizes the original film, reducing it to the status of the unseen classic" (40), but rather the shadow of the original series looms over the remake, making it somehow insignificant, as it seemingly has done with Alex Haley's hoax, overshadowing it with its own gripping narrative. The case of the two *Roots* miniseries conspicuously illustrates how vital in any production's reception is the social, historical and cultural context of its launching. The 2016 perspective leads to the reflection on how much has changed since 1977 in the way slavery is referred to and in the participation of African Americans in the dominant media discourse. However, as D'Addario notices, "the greatest danger for a story like *Roots* is that, through repetition, its images of evil become clichéd." What is distressing, though, is that racial violence, which is unquestionably the narrative's subject matter, still has its contemporary context in which the narrative of Kunta Kinte and the struggle of his descendants resonates with a disturbingly familiar note.

Works Cited

Andreeva, Nellie. "History to Remake Iconic *Roots* Miniseries." *Deadline*. 5 Nov. 2013. Web.

Boyd, Herb. "*Roots* returns with a bang." *The New York Amsterdam News* (24-30 May 2007). 30. Print.

Carter, Richard G. "It's been 35 years since landmark *Roots* exploded on TV." *The New York Amsterdam News* (19-25 Jan. 2012). 15. Print.

Crossing Over: How Roots Captivated an Entire Nation. Warner Bros documentary, 2007.

Crouch, Stanley. "The Roots of Alex Haley's Fraud." *New York Daily News* (12 April 1998). Web.

D'Addario, Daniel. "Almost 40 Years Later, a Miniseries Returns to Television's *Roots*." *Time* (30 May 2016). Web.

Delmont, Matthew F. *Making Roots: A Nation Captivated*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016. Print.

Gardner, Eric. "Black and White: American Genealogy, Race and Popular Response." *The Midwest Quarterly* 44.2 (Winter 2003): 148-160. Print.

Guthrie, Marisa. "*Roots* Reborn: How a Slave Saga Was Remade for the Black Lives Matter Era." *The Hollywood Reporter*. 25 May 2016. Web.

Haley, Alex. *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976. Print.

Henig, Adam. *Alex Haley's Roots: An Author's Odyssey*. 2014. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. Web.

Kaplan, Don. "Amazing *Roots* Returns After 40 Years, Dredging up Alex Haley Plagiarism Scandal." *New York Daily News* (19 May 2016). Web.

King, C. Richard. "What's Your Name? *Roots,* Race and Popular Memory in Post-Civil Rights America." *African Americans on Television: Race-ing for Ratings*. Ed. David J. Leonard and Lisa Guerrero. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2013. 69-82. Print.

King, C. Richard, and David L. Leonard "Letting America Off the Hook: *Roots, Django Unchained,* and the Divided White Self." *Reconsidering Roots: Race, Politics, and Memory*. Ed. Erica L. Ball and Kellie Carter Jackson. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017. 113-128. Print.

Leitch, Thomas. "Twice-told Tales: Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the Remake." *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*. Ed. Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. 37-62. Print.

Manley, Will. "Roots." *Booklist ONLINE* (1 Feb. 2010). Web.

Maranzani, Barbara. "Remembering Roots." History Stories, A+E Networks History.com. 11 Feb. 2016. Web**.**

McGuiness Philippa, "Roots remake: whatever happened to the 'major television event'?" *The Guardian* (27 July 2016). Web.

Mills, Gary B., and Elizabeth Shown Mills. "Roots and the New 'Faction': A Legitimate Tool for CLIO?" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89 (Jan. 1981): 3-26. Web.

Nobile, Philip, "Alex Haley's Hoax." *The Village Voice* (23 Feb. 1993). Print.

Poniewozik, James "'Roots' for a Black Lives Matter Era." *The New York Times* (29 May 2016). Web.

Reid, Calvin. "Fact or Fiction? Hoax Charges Still Dog *Roots* 20 Years On." *Publishers Weekly* (6 Oct. 1997): 16-17. Print.

Roots. 2016. A&E Studios. History Channel.

Roots. Viewing resources at A+E Networks History.com. Web.

Roots. 1976. The Original Series 1, 30th Anniversary 4-Disc Box Set. Warner Home Video [DVD] [2002]

Rothman, Lily. "The Roots of *Roots*." *Time* (30 May 2016). Web.

The Roots of Alex Haley. BBC documentary, 1996.

Elżbieta Horodyska

Heterotopic Domestic Spaces
in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*

Abstract: This essay proposes to read Marilynne Robinson's 1981 novel *Housekeeping* as a depiction of an imaginary journey that the protagonists undertake in search of habitable domesticity adaptable to change. In a sequence of stages, the house, physically and symbolically, undergoes radical transformation from a solid edifice, firmly rooted in cultural and societal structures, into a mobile Foucauldian heterotopic space (a ship), where boundaries between the inside and the outside, nature and civilization, place and placelessness, presence and absence collapse. Each stage of the transformation is linked to a hero who interacts with the spaces of the house creating, in each case, a unique interconnectedness reminiscent of Bachelard's poetics of nests and shells. I argue that the tension between permanence and transience in the novel is resolved in the bond which the two main characters forge in the course of their journey.

Keywords: Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*, Gaston Bachelard, Michel Foucault, heterotopia, Leo Marx, pastoralism, transience

Describing the landscape of Oregon, which serves as the setting for the events of her first novel, *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson underscores its powerful presence and impact on human lives. "There is a very, very strong emotional music that lives in what appear to other people to be essentially uninhabited places," she says (Robinson, *The Library of Congress Webcasts*). The idea contained in this observation is that landscape, like music, penetrates "the conscience that experiences it" (Robinson, *The Library of Congress Webcasts*) and interacts with it on the level of emotions. Domestic spaces act in a similar way—they are like music, which surrounds, enters into emotional dialogue with and structures the conscience in intimate yet powerful ways. In *Housekeeping*, the connection between domestic spaces and "the conscience that experiences it" undergoes transformation, as the house, in its initial form, gradually ceases to resonate with the protagonist and dissolves into more accommodating spaces.

In the novel, landscape, because of its sheer size, dominates space. Moreover, it is given human features in an attempt to render it habitable. Mountains and lakes acquire emotions and intentions and become active in shaping the metaphysical reality. By ascribing intentions to the landscape, the protagonist establishes a relationship and acquires a sense of security. Aided by her aunt, who is a transient

with no permanent home, she extends house boundaries onto the landscape in an attempt to domesticate it and thus shelter herself from it. Reversely, the realm of the house becomes more habitable by attuning itself to nature (also to the nature of those who live in it). These two movements, outward and inward, are presented in the novel through a process of gradual house dissolution into nature and through images of the domestication of landscape, which invades not only the physical space but also the imagination. The inside and the outside converge in a mutual exchange.

In this article, I wish to present the different stages that rooted domesticity goes through towards its dissolution and eventual transformation into a mobile space adaptable to change. I will specifically address the following set of problems: the permanence and stability of the "father house" and the hazy perimeters of Sylvie's "dissolving house" (using interpretative clues suggested by Paula E. Geyh), the intimacy, felicity and power of interaction with domestic spaces (on the basis of Gaston Bachelard's phenomenology put forward in *The Poetics of Space*), and the mediating properties of home as middle ground "between the realm of organized society and the realm of nature" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 43) (as illuminated by Leo Marx's discussion of the pastoral mode in "Pastoralism in America"). Further on, Michel Foucault's ideas on heterotopia and the structure of modern society will help to problematize the connection between the transformation of a house into a mobile space sensitive to change and the trope of a ship repeatedly employed in the novel.

At the beginning of the process of house dissolution is the "father house" (Geyh). The house is meant to contain and protect the family, in a physical sense as a solid permanent structure and in a symbolic sense as a part of Fingerbone's social structure. It has clear-cut boundaries and a set function. There can be no convergence of the two spheres, the inside and the outside, because the outside is a dangerous place, unpredictable and full of the "forces of ruin" (Robinson, *Housekeeping* 216): flood waters, snow, blizzards, wind, cold, darkness, decay, crime and the homeless. Hence, the function of the "father house" is to seal off the inside from the outside.

It can open to the outside only if the outside has clear-cut boundaries and a predictable structure. It is a private space in the public sphere of society, in which people have clearly defined roles (the sheriff, the school principal, the judge) embodied in the physical solid structures of town institutions (the police station, the school, the court). In its structure, the house encompasses the oppositions between the public and the private through the division of its space: the parlor is a public space in private, the porch is a private place in public. When the sheriff comes to talk to Sylvie, he remains on the porch thus demonstrating his affinity with the public sphere of Fingerbone and its society of well-kept stable houses, property lines and institutions.

When the "neighbor women and church women" (179), who feel, as Ruth explains, "obliged to come by their notions of piety and good breeding," (183) visit Sylvie, they sit in the parlor—the public space within the private space of the house. They are appalled to discover that the parlor has not been kept public. The fact that

it is "stacked to the ceiling" (180) with newspapers, magazines and cans confuses it with the marginal private spaces of the house such as the attic or the basement. This bewilders and then alarms them, because in their understanding the house should have well-defined and well-kept spaces. If it does not, it ceases to perform its social role. What is even more alarming, in Sylvie's house, not only the balance between the private and the public/social spaces has been upset; it has become permeable to nature as the fragmented remains of dead birds in the parlor prove. Fingerbone cannot accept that because nature is a life-threatening force. Symbolic restoration of the balance between the public and the private takes place when one of the women is introduced "as the wife of the probate judge" (180)—someone having a private relationship to a public figure—which automatically puts the house together with the neglected parlor in the public perspective and indicates that Sylvie has profoundly failed in her role as a housekeeper.

The "father house" is "the site for the reproduction of the patriarchal family" (Geyh 106) and a place where "fatherhood establishes itself" (Bal 107). On a larger scale, "the house is at the center of an outwardly expanding sphere of patriarchal power which links the house of the father to the house as family (as in the House of Abraham) to the house of the nation, encompassing and collapsing the oppositions between the public and private, the domestic and the political" (Geyh 106-107). The house is a privileged ground where the domestic and the political, the private and the public intersect. The woman's role is to guard its perimeters and maintain its stability within the structure of society.

Notwithstanding the male gendering, the house in modern society is generally seen as a female domestic space, also the right "place" for a woman (Geyh, Bal). The connection between the house and the woman also appears in literature. In such works as Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* and *The Interpretation of Dreams* and Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* the house and house imagery is often associated with the body of the nurturing mother: "Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house" (Bachelard 7). In *Housekeeping* the love, warmth, protection and comfort associated with the mother taking care of her children is personified by Edmund's wife—Sylvia.

> She had always known a thousand ways to circle them all around with what must have seemed like grace. She knew a thousand songs. Her bread was tender and her jelly was tart, and on rainy days she made cookies and applesauce. In the summer she kept roses in a vase on the piano, huge, pungent roses, and when the blooms ripened and the petals fell, she put them in a tall Chinese jar, with cloves and thyme and sticks of cinnamon. Her children slept on starched sheets under layers of quilts, and in the morning her curtains filled with light the way sails fill with wind. (12)

Through her presence and actions, which are interwoven with nature, Sylvia encloses the family in a protective cocoon of warmth—the house. She is the energy behind

the functioning of the household. Her actions are so artfully adapted to the needs of its inhabitants that her presence as a physical person blends in with the functioning of the house until one cannot be told from the other: "She was constant as daylight, and she would be unremarked as daylight" (19). She and the house form the essence of home, its soul. They are undistinguishable from each other.

In the art of creating the household, she functions, like her daughter Sylvie much later, as a mediator between the spheres of nature and the civilized world. She brings the best from both worlds to the middle ground of home. She uses societal stereotypes, "the worldly" (Marx, "Pastoralism in America" 44) appearances of a matron to her own and her family's advantage—to protect the inwardness and innocence of her daughters.

> In fact, she was often prompted or restrained by the thought of saving this unconsciousness of theirs. She was then a magisterial woman, not only because of her height and her large, sharp face, not only because of her upbringing, but also because it suited her purpose, to be what she seemed to be so that her children would never be startled or surprised, and to take on all the postures and vestments of matron, to differentiate her life from theirs, so that her children would never feel intruded upon. Her love for them was utter and equal, her government of them generous and absolute. (19)

What Sylvia appeared to be to the members of society—a stately matron, a figure brought forth by the civilized world—suited her purpose of protecting her daughters' naturalness.

Her actions are also coordinated with what is happening in nature. They depend on the weather, the seasons or the time of the day. For instance, she bakes cookies and makes applesauce when it rains. In the summer, she brings roses into the house, then dries the petals to make potpourri for the winter. She decorates the house in such a way as to harmonize it with the rhythm of nature. The curtains fill it with light and the dried petals, cloves, thyme and cinnamon—with fragrance. She not only adapts her family's life to the changes in nature but augments it by what nature currently offers. Whether this is done according to some process of rational decision making—the book does not say. It rather implies that she follows the natural flow. It seems as if she were a perfect homemaker and housewife, however not one identified with the town's social structures and institutions, but one connected to nature. Unnoticed and constant as daylight, Sylvia gracefully "navigates" her household as if she were a captain on a ship: "her curtains filled with light the way sails fill with wind."

Light and darkness are the two elements with which Robinson connects the two characters of mother and daughter—Sylvia and Sylvie. Inasmuch as Sylvia's propelling force is (day)light, it is darkness that drives Sylvie: "Sylvie liked to eat supper in the dark.… Just when the windows went stark blue [she] would call us

into the kitchen. Lucille and I sat across from each other and Sylvie at the end of the table. Opposite her was a window luminous and cool as aquarium glass and warped as water" (86). Just as Sylvia navigates her house compared to a ship whose sails/curtains fill with daylight, Sylvie sinks it in darkness, "the very element it was meant to exclude" (99). Is the element darkness or water, though? Through the extended metaphor the darkness of the night becomes the darkness of the bottom of the lake and the house is transformed into an aquarium. Sylvia rides the surface like a captain, whereas Sylvie explores the depths like a mermaid. "She seemed to dislike the disequilibrium of counterpoising a roomful of light against a worldful of darkness. Sylvie in a house was more or less like a mermaid in a ship's cabin" (99). Despite the differences between these two characters, Robinson connects both to the sphere of nature and the ensuing fluidity and transience rather than to the sphere of manmade societal and physical structures of impermeable boundaries.

Sinking the ship or burning the house is an act of destruction. "Now truly we were cast out to wander, and there was an end to housekeeping" (209), says Ruth, when she and Sylvie set fire to the father house. However, as Christine Wilson points out, Robinson does not postulate rejecting domesticity (303-307). Through the trope of the ship, which often appears throughout the novel, Robinson rather shows that domesticity can be revised and made livable in the face of events that change people's lives and make domestic space uninhabitable. In *Housekeeping* these events include the tragic losses that Ruth experiences. First she loses her father, who leaves, then her mother, who commits suicide, then her grandmother, who dies of old age, next her great-aunts, who leave. Finally she is abandoned by her only sister, Lucille, with whom she has been "almost as a single consciousness" (98).

The stable domesticity of well defined and well kept spaces, solid furniture and repetitive household rituals only gives an impression of solidity. Ruth reflects on its deceptiveness: "[T]he appearance of relative solidity in my grandmother's house was deceptive. It was an impression created by the piano, and the scrolled couch, and the bookcases full of almanacs and Kipling and Defoe. For all the appearance these things gave of substance and solidity, they might better be considered a dangerous weight on a frail structure" (158-159). Domesticity based on the permanence of a structure is not adaptive to change. As Wilson puts it, domesticity in this form "is unsuited for negotiating fluidity of all sorts" (305). It is not equipped to accommodate change and protect its inhabitants, which translates into Ruth's grandmother's fears of not being adequately equipped to protect children against disaster: "And it must have seemed, too, that she had only the frailest and most inappropriate tools for the most urgent uses. Once, she told us, she dreamed that she had seen a baby fall from an airplane and had tried to catch it in her apron, and once that she had tried to fish a baby out of a well with a tea strainer" (25). Ruth, in a reverie about mount Vesuvius erupting over Fingerbone and covering it with a layer of "stone," reflects that the only artifacts left for the "few survivors and the curious" to study would be "petrified pies and the fossils of casseroles" (183), left by the townswomen in a helpful

gesture towards Sylvie. The image of perishable food as a token of aid juxtaposed with the immensity of a volcanic eruption further emphasizes the ineffectiveness of permanent well-defined structures and the connected attitudes of "piety and good breeding" (183) in dealing with the drama of human life. As Laura Barrett argues, houses "[l]ess shelters than fences, … like bodies, are origins of division rather than protection" (13). Comparing her body to a house, Ruth says: "Let them come unhouse me of this flesh, and pry this house apart. It was no shelter now, it only kept me here alone" (159).

Ruth employs her imagination to search for alternative spaces. She invokes Noah's ark: "Imagine that Noah knocked his house apart and used the planks to build an ark, while his neighbors looked on, full of doubt. A house, he must have told them, should be daubed with pitch and built to float cloud high, if need be.… A house should have a compass and a keel" (184). According to Wilson, the invocation of Noah's ark in the book comes as an effect of the evolution of the idea earlier expressed by the ship and by Sylvie's unconventional housekeeping. The ark, built from materials which previously made up Noah's house, affirms the possibility of restructuring, not destroying, the domestic space:

> The invocation of Noah's ark implies the possibility of rebuilding domesticity and functions as a logical conclusion to Sylvie's unconventional, boundary-breaking housekeeping. Ruth's reverie proposes a transformation, not an annihilation, of domestic space. With the pieces of his house, Noah builds his new living space; he does not begin from scratch. The alternative domestic space is governed by its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. (305)

Robinson does not reject domesticity in favor of wandering. Through the employment of the metaphor of the ship, which becomes Noah's ark, she rather points to a possibility of revising, unmooring so to speak, the traditional model based on permanence and stability. Thus Ruth finds it unimaginable to enter a house which looks like a "moored ship," with its artificial full illumination standing in stark opposition to the surrounding darkness and forming a barrier impossible to cross. "The house stood out beyond the orchard with every one of its windows lighted. It looked large, and foreign, and contained, like a moored ship—a fantastic thing to find in a garden. I could not imagine going into it" (203). Robinson uses the ship's properties of mobility, flexibility and freedom to underscore the possibility of finding habitability within domesticity that is adaptive to change, unmoored, not in opposition to its environment, not "contained" but containing, enveloping, inclusive.

Symptomatically, habitability does not have to be linked with domesticity. It can be the function of other spaces, not necessarily domestic, since it "is not tied to a particular kind of space or location, but rather to a relationship between the subject and space" (Wilson 299-300). Habitability is possible when "subjects make space their own" (299). Ruth, for instance, can make landscape her own by giving it

home-like features. This appears in her narration when she describes nature during her excursions to the lake and the forested mountains. She often compares natural surroundings to familiar household spaces, objects or activities like cleaning and cooking. The clouds "soak[] up the light like a stain" (7), the lake "brims inside this circle of mountains" (9), the woods "are as dark and stiff and as full of their own odors as the parlor of an old house" (98), the mountains look like "the broken lip of an iron pot, just at simmer" (112), the sandy lakeshore "abstract[s] its crude shape into one pure curve of calligraphic delicacy" (113), the water of the bay "seem[s] almost viscous, membranous, and here things mass[] and accumulate[], as they do in cobwebs or in the eaves and unswept corners of a house. It [is] a place of distinctly domestic disorder" (113) and the sky "glow[s] like a candled egg" (161). Sylvie, on the other hand domesticates the outside by literally furnishing the garden—she drags a davenport sofa from the house into the front yard, where it remains until it is "weathered pink" (86). The forces of nature cannot be blocked out by walls; no door will make them stay outside, she seems to say. Like Ruth through imagination, she by way of actions constantly traverses the boundaries of inside and outside, both extends the space of the house outward and invites nature inside. As Laura Barrett argues, "Sylvie treats the outside as if it were her living room, and the inside as if it were her garden" (18).

In his seminal essay "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias," Michel Foucault writes that in modern culture, we conceive of space as formed by the relations between sites defined by a particular set of relations. Heterotopias are special in that they relate to all other sites and additionally "suspect, neutralize or invert the set of relations that [these sites] happen to designate." If we consider the relations between the sites of the house and the outside in *Housekeeping*, we will see that the space formed as a consequence of their interconnectedness has some features characteristic of a heterotopia, as it inverts the set of relations these sites designate: as a result of Sylvie's agency, who extends the living room outward and the garden inward, the space contains both the designating relations of the inside and the outside blurring the boundary between the two. What is more, the trope of the ship so extensively employed in the novel, finds its parallel in Foucault's universe, where the vessel occupies "a place without a place" as the purest kind of heterotopia found in culture:

> [The ship] is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens…. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. (Foucault)

The ship as a heterotopia in *Housekeeping* serves to expose and contest the illusion of stability of the house. "Foucault's ship is unique because it traverses the boundaries between fluidity and stability, interior and exterior, place and placelessness.…

Robinson's use of the ship can be read in a similar way, as a creation of habitability" (Wilson 299). Seen this way, Wilson further argues, Robinson's house becomes a

> transitional space that leads to habitability. If we view heterotopian domestic space as habitable, sustained habitability is impossible within the scope of [the novel]. If, however, we think of [the] revised domestic [space] as bringing the characters to habitability, much like a ship brings its passengers to the brothel or the colony, habitability is invigorated, not destroyed. (307)

The heterotopia of the ship epitomizes the characters' voyage in search for habitability, which is possible through the act of making space their own, domesticating the landscape and opening the site of the house to landscape.

The ship "is linked to the fluidity of water, distinguishing it from other modes of transportation" (Wilson 307). Water, which is frequently and abundantly (the huge lake, the flood) mentioned in the novel, represents flux, constant movement and change, as well as freedom and life. The train, another mode of transportation that appears in the novel, although a mobile space, signifies the opposite of adaptability and hence cannot bring the characters to "invigorated" habitability. Rather, it leads them toward death, the death of a family member. It is thus more connected to Mieke Bal's "father-house" and the sphere of strict impermeable boundaries and permanent structures, the ones described by the disillusioned Ruth as "worse than useless" (184). Wilson describes the train in the following way:

> Like a ship, a train is a vehicle of travel and movement. But the train is more closely bound to a set path—if it leaves its tracks, disaster and tragedy ensue. It is also an implicitly masculine space, at least partly responsible for and symbolic of the mastery and settlement of the land. As spaces, the train and the house are equally dictated by patriarchy. (306)

The train as a symbol of masculinity and "the mastery and settlement of the land" is linked to the only male protagonist of the novel, Edmund Foster. Although dead long before Ruth and Lucille are born, he is the girls' progenitor responsible for the settlement of Fingerbone and for planting them "down in this unlikely place" (3). He came to the town by train from the Middle West: "[I]t was he who brought us here, to this bitter, moon-pulled lake, trailing us after him unborn, like the infants he had painted on the dresser drawers, whose garments swam in some ethereal current, perhaps the rim of the vortex that would drag them down out of that enameled sky, stripped and screaming" (149). If we think of the mechanical train as symbolic of a brute force and the subordination of nature, Edmund's mastery and settlement of the land is quite different. It is not synonymous with violent conquest and exploitation. It is rather connected with the efforts to master the land through knowledge and classification. His dictionary, which the girls use to find the term "pinking shears"

(126) is full of dried plants and flowers pressed between the pages, placed in accordance with the location of their definition. Edmund's masculinity is realized not through the exploitation but through the exploration of nature.

Especially in the spring, he loses himself in the study of nature and becomes forgetful of society bonds expressed through dress, church membership and his role in the family as husband. Nevertheless, these moments in the spring are the ones his wife Sylvia cherishes most, as they bring her a palpable connection to Edmund, although "in that season it had never seemed to her that they were married" (17). The act of marriage as a socially enforced bond thus seems to belong to the sphere of deceptively solid structures and is not synonymous with intimacy.

> The rising of the spring stirred a serious, mystical excitement in him, and made him forgetful of her. He would pick up eggshells, a bird's wing, a jawbone, the ashy fragment of a wasp's nest. He would peer at each of them with the most absolute attention and then put them in his pockets.… He would peer at them as if he could read them, and pocket them as if he could own them. This is death in my hand, this is ruin in my breast pocket, where I keep my reading glasses. At such times he was forgetful of her as he was of his suspenders and his Methodism, but all the same it was then that she loved him best, as a soul all unaccompanied, like her own. (17)

This closeness and intimacy finds further expression in the house that Edmund builds for his family. In its structure, the house has more in common with Gaston Bachelard's nests and shells described in *Poetics of Space* than with the solid structures of town houses. "It is body and soul" (Bachelard, 7).

According to Bachelard, both the nest and the shell are a direct expression of the "function of habitability" of their owners. The bird forms the nest with its own body, its breast—its heart, giving it the characteristic roundness, whereas the mollusk secretes the very building material out of which its house is made and envelopes it around its body to a perfect fit. (The association with clothing is not accidental, as, according to Bachelard, dreams of "garment-house[s] are not unfamiliar to those who indulge in the imaginary exercise of the function of inhabiting.") Both of these houses, the nest and the shell, are "built by and for the body, taking form from the inside… in an intimacy that works physically." Their form "is commanded by the inside" (Bachelard, 101). Edmund's house is the result of his embodied soul's physical labor, built in stages, some of them not completed and not complementary with one another.

Driven by an inside impulse like an insect that enters a new stage in its development, Edmund stops dreaming and begins acting. He quits painting mountains, abandons his underground quarters—his subterranean house compared to a grave "with windows just at earth level and just at eye level" (3)—and travels north-west to a higher ground, to live in the mountains. He carefully selects an isolated spot on the edge of town and constructs the house on elevated ground to

give it protection against the annual flooding of the lake. His prudence proves very effective as the family rarely has "more than a black pool in [the] cellar, with a few skeletal insects skidding around on it" (5).

The house rises gradually around him like a shell, in accordance with the family's fluctuating needs and Edmund's growing skills. He makes the furniture for his wife's bedroom. His painting skills now diffuse into the ornamentation of the furniture—a hunting scene, a peacock, the cherubs "whose garments swam in some ethereal current" (149). The legs of the wardrobe and the chest are a bit awkward as they have to "compensate for the slope of the floor" (89). The room itself is three steps lower than the rest of the ground floor probably to accommodate the house to uneven ground.

The crowning effect of his acquisition of knowledge about materials and carpentry are the stairs "wide and polished, with a heavy railing and spindle banisters" (47). However, the stairs unexpectedly culminate in a wall. The wall is "essential to supporting the roof" (47) hence it cannot be tampered with. Consequently, the entrance upstairs is through a trapdoor "left over from the time when the second floor was merely a loft with a ladder up to it" (48). To facilitate entry onto the second floor, Edmund equips the trapdoor with an intricate "device with pulleys and window weights" (48). Thus the seams where the stages of house construction meet are not always smooth.

If one looks closely at a shell, one sees that it is built out of segments. These segments are added gradually as the animal grows and changes. The bindings between segments are frequently uneven and awkward, no doubt an effect of circumstances and the animal's physical condition. Bizarre as Edmund's house may be, its form is "commanded by the inside," by the builder's current skill and condition, imagination and heart as well as his family's changing needs over the years of habitation. As the different spaces, "labyrinths of our privacy" (182) as Ruth calls them, like the segments of a shell, are added gradually, they sometimes subvert one another, like the "stairs, solid, glistening, permanent, are subverted by their ineffectuality" (Barrett 12).

The shell resembles the ship in that it is a mobile home. The ship is a heterotopia where oppositions meet. In this sense, Edmund's house is a heterotopia. It constitutes "heterotopian domestic space" (Wilson 307). Moreover, it seems to epitomize what Michel Foucault says about our contemporary experience of the world, which is "less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (Foucault). Edmund's house is a network of people and spaces that intertwine and interact with one another. Laura Barrett calls Edmund's house "a labyrinth, simultaneously a structure of containment and possibility, enclosure and dispossession" (12). It is interesting to analyze how this structure made up of oppositions interacts with its inhabitants throughout the years of its existence. For, as Bachelard points out, the house is "the real beginning of images" (5), "a large cradle" (7) and "our corner of the world" (4).

The house is Edmund's daughters' "first world," an "earthly… material paradise," where carefully selected and plucked nature's treasures enclose them in warmth and safety. Edmund, the constructor and father, accommodates the house to the uneven ground, whereas Sylvia, the navigator and mother, harmonizes the household with the rhythm of nature. Here, their children are "bathed in nourishment" (Bachelard 7) by both parents, symbolically depicted as two seahorses in one of Edmund's paintings for his wife before they had children. "Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house" (Bachelard 7). Whereas the expression "the bosom of the house" associates "the house with the figure and body of the nurturing mother" (Geyh 106), the image of seahorses connects it to the father. The connection is intimate, not patriarchal. The house is like the male seahorse's pouch, in which it carries the offspring. Edmund's domestic space is thus the dominion of both the feminine and the masculine. Here the two "Powers Meet" (85).

This heterotopian domestic space, where powers, oppositions and also generations meet in a mutually constructing juxtaposition, is a scene of habitation for all the characters who live and grow (and die) over the years within the space. However, the characters do not just act out their lives against the "inert" background of the house. They interact with the setting. As Paula E. Geyh argues, neither space nor its inhabitants exist independently of one another, but are "mutually constructing" (104). "We do not live inside a void," says Michel Foucault. Just as spaces are constructed by us and thus are an expression of us—"our worst faults" as well as "our best qualities" (Robinson 74)—we are equally constructed by the spaces in which we dwell: "while subjects constitute themselves through the creation of spaces, these same spaces also elicit and structure subjectivities" (Geyh 104).

The interconnectedness in a mutually constructing juxtaposition can be said to operate beyond time and death. For if Edmund had expressed himself through the construction of his home, to that extent he is active in the formation of his granddaughters' subjectivities. Inasmuch as he had expressed himself in the space of the house, he constructs, long after his death, the two distinct female attitudes represented by Lucille and Ruth: the settled and the transient (Geyh 105). Thus, although physically absent, Edmund is present in the girls' everyday life through the space that he had created and in which they now dwell. It may be argued that this dialogue with the girls conducted in Edmund's case from beyond the grave is translated into Ruth's tendency to ponder surfaces: the surface of the lake and the surface of the mirror and to constantly strive to reach beyond surfaces. It is also translated into her feelings of experiencing presence where there is absence, as in her reflections about feeling a palpable presence of her mother, who is no longer among the living. Lucille, on the other hand, wants to live within the utopian space created by things reflected by the surface. She needs to see herself in the mirror.

Within the house, there is a single place literally made up of oppositions—the window. Its double nature may well serve to illustrate the two subjectivities formed

in the house—the settled and the transient. They oppose and exclude each other. The window, depending on whether it is "closed or open… might either divide or connect the inside and the outside" (Geyh 110). So, it simultaneously constitutes and endangers the boundaries of the house. Lucille wants impermeable boundaries, clear-cut divisions, solid structures and permanent things. She prefers the window closed and the light on. She has aims and targets. "I knew that Lucille would not go off in the dark by herself if she did not have somewhere to go," says Ruth (140). Ruth connects to Sylvie, to transience and the outside. She prefers the window open or the light off. "Darkness is the only solvent," she says (116).

Lucille switches on the light and marks the division between the interior and the exterior. Even her name, which derives from the Latin *lux*, associates her with thus created circle of light. However, when the light is on, the window becomes blind to the outside. It reflects only what is inside and excludes everything that is outside. It becomes a mirror. "The window contains its own antithesis, the mirror, and the mode of its existence is determined by the play of light and darkness" (Geyh 111). Not only is the mirror the antithesis of the window, it is also a heterotopia. A unique one too, because it is also a utopia in the sense that it furnishes the illusion of being in a place that does not exist: "In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not" (Foucault). Thus, the lighted window not only excludes but also fixes one on the self and creates the illusion of being an impermeable whole.

> When one looks from inside at a lighted window, or looks from above at the lake, one sees the image of oneself in a lighted room, the image of oneself among trees and sky—the deception is obvious, but flattering all the same. When one looks from the darkness into the light, however, one sees all the difference between here and there, this and that. (Robinson 158)

Lucille stays within the circle of light and excludes Ruth. Lucille's "loyalties" are "with the other world" (95), the civilized world. She acquires the "ability to look the way one [is] supposed to look" and strives for "easy and casual appearance" (121). Believing in the reality of reflection, in the utopia of the mirror, she "roll[s] her anklets and puff[s] her bangs," uses "setting gel and nail polish," but, as Ruth complains, "try as she might, she could never do as well for me" (121). Lucille excludes her sister, because, in her words, it is odd "to spend [so] much time… looking out of windows" or "tie back one's hair with grocery string" (133).

"Having a sister or a friend is like sitting at night in a lighted house," says Ruth (154). "Anyone with one solid human bond is that smug," she continues. Upon losing her sister, the one human bond that made her feel at home in the world, Ruth feels "unhoused" for the second time since her mother died. Consequently, Ruth, like her biblical counterpart, follows her next of kin, Sylvie, to regain the bond and thus find home again. "We are the same. She could as well be my mother. I crouched and slept in her very shape like an unborn child" (145). During their excursion in

a little boat across the lake to the abandoned homestead in the mountains, Ruth is symbolically born again to be Sylvie's daughter. Through a number of images invoking birth, she adopts Sylvie as her mother. Sylvie, on her part, makes Ruth undergo a "rite of passage, a ritual of rebirth and connection" (Ravits 661), which "is complete when Ruth's internalized struggle against the sense of abandonment is resolved in her kinship with Sylvie" (Ravits 661).

If Sylvie makes it easier for Ruth to identify with the realm of nature (Sylvie's name derives from Latin *silva* meaning "wood, forest"), she is also crucial in facilitating Lucille's transition into the civilized world. By being her opposite she makes Lucille see where she belongs—within the circle of light and its illusion of stability. In other words, Lucille assumes her new identity by rejecting Sylvie's transience. "The tenant and the transient face one another across a divide of mutual incomprehension" (Geyh 116). Thus, Sylvie's role in both Ruth's and Lucille's development into who they become—the transient and the tenant—can be seen as that of a "mediator between the realm of organized society and the realm of nature" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 43). In this, she is like the shepherd of the ancient forms of the pastoral.

In his article "Pastoralism in America," Leo Marx traces the origins of "pastoral-ism, a widely shared viewpoint that cast favor on the herdsman and his ways" (43) to "the earliest known uses of writing in Mesopotamia near the end of the fourth millennium (roughly 3100 B.C.)" (42). In the ancient forms of the pastoral "[t]he herdsman of the ancient Near East characteristically is a 'liminal figure' who moves back and forth across the borderland between civilization and nature" (43). For him "[t]o mediate… means… to resolve the root tension between civilization and nature by living in the borderland between them. The mediation is two-directional. In the earliest documents there are instances of a shepherd helping to effect the passage of people moving either to or from the organized community" (43). Thus, Sylvie's role in directing the girls towards the two opposing worlds is comparable to the one played by the shepherd in the ancient forms of pastoralism, and her house becomes "a cultural halfway house" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 43), the borderland where her two-directional mediation takes place.

Marx argues that the "pastoral perspective, or pastoral-ism" ("Pastoralism" 46) as a worldview and a mode has been present and recurring in different forms of human expression since the times of ancient Mesopotamia (e.g. the Epic of Gilgamesh). Through Virgil's Eclogues and the European shepherd poem of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, it took new root in America. Here, a pastoral perspective emerged in both political life (e.g. in the political thought of Thomas Jefferson and in individual acts of civil disobedience, such as Henry David Thoreau's refusal to pay taxes to the state that supported slavery and engaged in war) and in literature as a set of recognizable motifs, a typical structure of narration and a hero. The hero, "independent, self-sufficient, and… singularly endowed with the qualities needed to endure long periods of solitude, discomfort, and deprivation" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 43) constantly mediates between the realms of nature and civilization.

"[T]his liminal figure combines traits that result from his having lived as both a part of, and apart from, nature; from his having lived as both a part of, and apart from, society" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 43). Sylvie possesses all the typical traits of the pastoral hero. She has lived as both the tenant and the transient, and has knowledge of both worlds. Her mastery of a boat against the expanse of the lake is impressive. Her knowledge of the lake currents and the wind tells her when and how to row and when to let go and be carried by the water. The shepherd's "job is to protect his flock from such menaces of nature as storms, drought, and predatory animals" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 43). Her navigation skills are convincing enough for Ruth to fall asleep on the bottom of the boat. She knows simple yet effective ways to comfort cold and fatigue. She can sleep on benches in public parks and she tells the time by knowing the train schedule. She rides the railroad, the symbolic "Atropos that never turns aside" (Thoreau 115). Her knowledge of the train schedule allows her to use the railroad bridge across the lake to lead Ruth out of Fingerbone to freedom.

Henry David Thoreau, Ishmael and Huck Finn are real and fictitious American heroes who also embody the characteristic features of the pastoral hero. At the core of pastoralism, as Marx writes, is "our inescapable confinement to a symbolic border country" ("Pastoralism" 44). Thus, the "underlying attitude" of the pastoral hero "would imply acceptance of the need, in virtually all aspects of experience, to mediate—to strive for acceptable if transitory resolutions—between the constraints of society and the constraints of nature" (44). Because pastoralism has assumed an "opposition between the realm of the collective, the organized, and the worldly on the one hand, and the personal, the spontaneous, and the inward on the other" (44)—it "comports with a dialectical mode of perception" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 44).

Across the divide of the lighted window are the two girls, Lucille and Ruth, in a situation resembling the one of the two main characters of Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*, on which Ruth writes a report for school. Although standing in opposition to each other, they are irrevocably linked, in their case—by the bonds of kinship. Ahab is joined to Ishmael in an expression of a "complex pastoralism in which the ideal is inseparably yoked to its opposite" (Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* 318). Sylvie, like Huck Finn mediates between "the worldly" and "the inward," "the collective" and "the personal" (Marx, "Pastoralism" 44) to deliver Ruth to freedom. Sylvie's mobility as a mediator, her constant movement back and forth across boundaries corresponds to the mobility of the ship—the heterotopia, domesticity adaptive to change, the middle ground between civilization and nature: home.

Works Cited

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. Print.

Bal, Mieke. *Death and Dissymetry: The Poetics of Coherence in The Book of Judges*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. Print.

Barrett, Laura. "'[T]he Ungraspable Phantom of Life:' Incompletion and Abjection in *Moby Dick* and *Housekeeping*." *South Atlantic Review* 73.3 (2008): 1-22. Print.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces, Utopias and Heterotopias." Trans. Jay Miskowiec. Web. 25 Mar. 2018. http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf

Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McLintock, London: Penguin Books, 2003. Print.

———. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. A.A. Brill. New York: Macmillan, 1913. Print.

Geyh, Paula E. "Burning Down the House? Domestic Space and Feminine Subjectivity in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *Contemporary Literature* 34.1 (1993): 103-122. Print.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Print.

———. "Pastoralism in America." *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen, Cambridge University Press, 1986. Print.

Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2002. Print.

Ravits, Martha. "Extending the American Range: Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*." *American Literature* 61.4 (1989): 644-666. Print.

Robinson, Marilynne. *Housekeeping*. London: Faber & Faber Limited, 2005. Print.

———. *The Library of Congress Webcasts*. 22 Sep. 2012. Web. 25 Mar. 2018. www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5654

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004. Print.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Tom Sawyer's Comrade)*. New York: Harper, 1904. The Internet Archive's Open Library. Web. 25 Mar. 2018. www.openlibrary.org/books/OL13991894M/The_adventures_of_Huckleberry_Finn_(Tom_Sawyer's_comrade)

———. *The Prince and the Pauper*. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2000. Internet Archive. Web. 10 Mar 2018. www.archive.org/details/princepauper00twai_0

Wilson, Christine. "Delinquent Housekeeping: Transforming the Regulations of Keeping House." *Legacy* 25.2 (2008): 299-310. Print.

Klara Szmańko

Defamiliarizing Blackness and Whiteness
in Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*

Abstract: Gloria Naylor defamiliarizes in *Linden Hills* (1985) both white and non-white racial categories, in this case blackness and whiteness, both of which emerge as largely performable identities. The defamiliarization of blackness is fairly direct, unfolding mostly through the predominantly negative portrayal of Linden Hills residents and the male line of the Nedeed dynasty, especially Luther Nedeed IV. The defamiliarization of whiteness is mostly indirect, taking place primarily through the exposure of Linden Hills residents' imitation of whiteness, in particular, the pursuit of what is presented as the negative paradigm of the white materialistic success and the disastrous consequences that stem from it. Upper class African Americans from the well-off neighborhood of Linden Hills are of ethnographic interest to less prosperous African Americans, many of whom envy Linden Hills residents and some of whom look down on them as presumable sell-outs and traitors of black people. Much of the defamiliarization of prosperous black residents of Linden Hills by lower class African Americans happens through visual exchanges between both groups. While whiteness is not on most occasions a part of these exchanges, it is still alluded to time and again as a pivotal factor that comes into play and that determines the rules of the game.

Keywords: blackness, whiteness, defamiliarization and construction of racial categories, mimicry, vision

Gloria Naylor defamiliarizes in *Linden Hills* (1985) both white and non-white racial categories, in this case blackness and whiteness, both of which emerge as largely performable identities. The defamiliarization of blackness is fairly direct, unfolding mostly through the predominantly negative portrayal of Linden Hills residents and the male line of the Nedeed dynasty, especially Luther Nedeed IV. The defamiliarization of whiteness is mostly indirect, taking place primarily through the exposure of Linden Hills residents' imitation of whiteness, in particular, the pursuit of what is presented as the negative paradigm of the white materialistic success and the disastrous consequences that stem from it. Upper class African Americans from the well-off neighborhood of Linden Hills are of ethnographic interest to less prosperous African Americans, many of whom envy Linden Hills residents and some of whom look down on them as presumable sell-outs and traitors of black people. Much of the defamiliarization of prosperous black residents of Linden Hills by lower class African Americans happens through visual exchanges between both groups. While whiteness is not on most occasions a part of these exchanges, it is still alluded to time

and again as a pivotal factor that comes into play and that determines the rules of the game. The chosen African American characters of the novel are endowed with privileged insight, but the white eye of America also does the watching, fixing black people with its panoptic gaze. One of the ironies brought out by the novel is the fact that prosperous residents of Linden Hills imitate whiteness in its surveillance of underprivileged African Americans.

Naylor focalizes most of the narration through Willie's and Lester's point of view, supporters of the black cultural movement. Proud of their own blackness, they shun whiteness, white standards and norms. Willie's nickname "White" is a pun on his very black skin color, so black that in his childhood he is afraid that the sun will make him white. Most of the defamiliarization of blackness takes place through Willie's and Lester's eyes. They look down on the Linden Hills black bourgeoisie that does its best to emulate whiteness, even at the cost of cooperating with the racist Citizens Alliance of Wayne County in order to "keep those dirty niggers out of their community" (135). The posh black neighborhood of Linden Hills becomes something else than its founder, Luther Nedeed II, originally envisioned it to be. Luther Nedeed II donated the land to humble working and middle class African Americans drudging for every penny predominantly in white houses or businesses: "digging another man's coal, cleaning another man's home, rocking another man's baby" (9). Luther II challenges property relations, which envisioned white people as owners of the best land. Reserving the best and most expensive land in the county exclusively for African Americans, Luther at least partly undermines the status of African Americans as objects of property. By effectively banning white people from the neighborhood through the caveat enclosed in each lease contract that the land will be inherited exclusively by African Americans, he also chips away at the self-created exclusivity of whiteness. It is no longer the "exclusive club" created by whites (Harris 1736), but a kind of exclusive club created by the Nedeed dynasty exclusively for African Americans. Discovering belatedly the potential of the Linden Hills location, whites try to re-appropriate the neighborhood for themselves. Yet Nedeed defeats them with their own weapon, that is, the law. Luther II's intention is to cross white people's design, to "be a fly in that ointment, a spot on the bleached sheet" (8), to make Linden Hills "a wad of spit—a beautiful, black wad of spit right in the white eye of America" (9). The visual metaphor of the "white eye" effectively renders whites' position in Luther II's design because envious as they are, they can only watch the Linden Hills property as they drive by, being "waved at by the maids, mammies and mules" (9).

Luther III upgrades Luher II's vision—Linden Hills is not just to be "a sore" in the "white eye of America." It was to "fester and pus over" (9). Linden Hills is to be transformed into "a jewel," "an ebony jewel that reflected the soul of Wayne County [the neighboring white residential area] but reflected it black" (10). "Reflect" entails a mirror reflection, looking for the source of one's strength outside rather than inside. Luther III's design also goes against the moral life force of the novel captured by

Grandma Tilson's statement: "when it's crazy *outside*, you look inside and you'll always know exactly where you are and what you are" (59, original emphasis). Rather than nourish itself on the resources derived from decades of African American experience, in Luther III's design Linden Hills is to be patterned on white materialistic success, "reflect it black," ostensibly showcasing the untapped potential of black people, but in reality gnawing away at their inner strength and vitality.

If Nedeed's model community of Linden Hills is to be based on white materialistic success, then its source is quite suspicious, considering that the roots of white materialistic success in the United States often had their grounding in the exploitation of African Americans and African American suffering. The imagery of the passage depicting Luther III's design evokes whiteness that Nedeed wants to imitate: "ebony jewel," "shining bright—so bright," "brilliance" (10). Under Luther III's design the glittering Linden Hills is to "spawn dreams of dark kings with dark counselors leading dark armies against the white god and toward a retribution all feared would not be just, but long overdue" (10). On the surface, the passage may bring up distant echoes of W.E. B. Du Bois's appraisal of black prowess conjured up by the vision of "the shadow of a mighty Negro past flit[ting] through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx" (*The Souls of Black Folk* 6) as well as of "the darker world that watches" ("The Souls of White Folk" 936). Yet if one delves deeper, it becomes apparent that Luther III Nedeed's goal is primarily building up and showing off his own personal power: "a brilliance that would force a waking nightmare of what the Nedeeds were capable. And the fools would never realize… that it was nothing but light from a hill of carbon paper dolls" (10). The imagery of the passage exposes the vacuity of Luther III's design, being a far cry from the founding father, Luther II's vision: "nothing but light from a hill of carbon paper dolls" (10). The pursuit of materialistic success strips the inhabitants of Linden Hills of moral, ethical fiber and their connection to African American tradition. Like paper dolls, they are empty inside. The fact that carbon paper serves as the cornerstone of the vehicle for the doll metaphor amplifies the sense of vacuity and imitation.

Can Linden Hills residents' imitation of whiteness be classified as mimicry? Homi Bhabha defines mimicry as a repetition with a difference (88), "almost the same but not quite" (89). Drawing on Homi Bhabha, Parama Roy characterizes mimicry as an "imperfect doubling" (195). In "(Post)Colonialism, Anthropology and the Magic of Mimesis," Graham Huggan expands on the findings of earlier scholars—Adorno, Taussig,[1] Bhabha—and draws a clear distinction between mimicry and mimesis (91). While mimicry is a "mischievous," "disruptive imitation," mimesis is a "symbolic representation" (94-95). Huggan notes a clear difference between "mimicry of the white man" and the "mimicry of the white man's mimetic representation" of marginalized people (94). Since mimesis approximates the latter,

---

1   The works in question are: Huggan cites Taussig's *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses; Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man* and Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*.

it is safe to say that Linden Hills residents imitation of whiteness has nothing to do with mimesis. If one assumes Bhabha's definition of mimicry as a repetition with a difference, then the elements of mimicry can be traced there. The crucial difference that cannot be surmounted is that, however close to whiteness Linden Hills residents are or want to be through their lifestyle, their Tudor mansions, their mentality and in some cases their disregard for underprivileged African Americans whom they call "dirty niggers" (135), they are phenotypically black. They may mean everything inside their safe space of Linden Hills, but outside their status is often inferior to that of whites. The prestige of living in Linden Hills counterbalances the denigration of blackness that they may experience outside Linden Hills: "In Linden Hills they could forget that the world said you spelled black with a capital nothing" (16). Everything "around them" in Linden Hills shows that "they were something" (16). In many ways Linden Hills is the symbol of possibilities, of what African Americans can represent if they are not impeded by the color bar. Linden Hills is the space of opportunities, while the space outside marks the world of curtailed possibilities, of "someone else's history about what you couldn't ever do" (16). According to the narrator, white people are in charge of history outside Linden Hills, whereas the Nedeeds are in charge of history inside Linden Hills. In light of this statement, it is also essential to look at another crucial element of mimicry, that is, the element of "recalcitrance" and "double articulation" (Bhabha 86), identified by Lacan as "the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare" (Lacan qtd. in Bhabha 86). Still, is there any element of recalcitrance in the Linden Hills residents' imitation of whiteness? Applying the term mimicry in reference to African American inhabitants of Linden Hills, Henry Louis Gates emphasizes in his article "Significant Others" the potential for subversion in mimicry (619). In particular, Gates finds traces of possible subversion in the ending of the novel, in the fact that that the residents of Linden Hills offer no help to the Nedeed family when their house is consumed by fire. Christine G. Berg and Hanna Wallinger offer a similar interpretation of the ending, also noting that signs of hope for the transformation of the neighborhood can be read into the fact that no help is proffered to Luther Nedeed when the house apparently "condemn[s] him" (Naylor 285). The basis of this interpretation derives from the repetition of the sentence "They let it burn" five times in the closing section of the novel (Naylor 304). The sentence is uttered twice by Willie, twice by Lester and finally it is repeated one final time by the narrator, who italicizes the words: "*They let it burn*" (304). The uttered words clearly have a different coloring while spoken by Willie and a different one once spoken by Lester. In Wllie's mouth they are a sign of dismay at the indifference of Linden Hills residents. The second repetition of the words by Lester: "No, don't you see—they let it burn" (304), suggests that Lester has a different interpretation of Linden Hills residents' refusal to interfere in the fire of the Nedeed family house. Christine G. Berg argues that Lester reads it as a sign of hope for the community that they did not help Luther Nedeed IV (5). According to Berg, for Lester their refusal to intervene may signify the residents' willingness to reject

Luther Nedeed's vision of reality and of the neighborhood. Hanna Wallinger goes so far as to claim that "in death, it seems, the Luther Nedeeds of this world have no friends" (185). Wallinger seems to place the onus of responsibility on Luther, at least partly absolving the inhabitants of Linden Hills. It is also worth mentioning that the inaction of Linden Hills residents is preceded a few days earlier with his own inaction when he passively watches the suicide of Laurel Dumont.

Cathartic as the fire of Luther's house seems to be, there is no evidence in the narrative to indicate that Linden Hills' refusal to help stands for anything else than dehumanization, the lack of empathy and the moral and spiritual extinguishment. Willie's agonized and dismay-filled repetition "They let it burn" intensifies the effect of spiritual and emotional coldness hovering over the Linden Hills neighborhood. His reaction is a follow-up on his window smashing that manages to break Linden Hills residents' inaction. It is strange that Lester suddenly sees the sign of hope in the residents' failure to intervene since throughout the novel woven mostly around Willie's and Lester's journey through Linden Hills, he has been nothing but critical of the residents and he has seen nothing that could produce any positive response or foreshadow any shift in Linden Hills' set ways. At stake during the fire is not only the help extended to Luther IV, but also to the wife, Willa Nedeed, and the child. The same people who two days earlier bend over backwards to flatter Luther IV at Lycentia Parker's wake, two days later abandon him at the most critical moment.

The dehumanization and the lack of empathy displayed during the fire is consistent with inaction and indifference to human suffering evinced by Linden Hills residents before the fire. On all previous occasions when they deliberately fail to react, they wash their hands off other people's suffering, approaching it as a given, as a personal drama that should play itself out solely within the narrow circle of one's family. The mindset of Linden Hills residents tells them to place the responsibility for any suffering exclusively on the shoulders of the afflicted person and their relatives. The philosophy of standing on the sidelines in the face of human drama is best encapsulated by the Linden Hills historian, Dr. Braithwaite, who openly speaks to Willie and Lester about his dispassionate attitude. To Willie and Lester's horror, he is a moral relativist, claiming that there is no point in trying to prevent tragic events because they are bound to happen. Therefore Braithwaite undertakes no steps to prevent the suicide of Laurel Dumont, but passively watches her progressing mental collapse. Braithwaite's response to Willie and Lester's indignation at his failure to act is a lecture on history and history writing. According to Braithwaite, "*History is a written photograph*" and a historian should be a dispassionate observer, a passive witness to the unfolding events. Both in history writing and his observation of the most immediate events Braithwaite is interested in asking the question "what happened" rather than "why," neglecting the causes and possible solutions (266, original emphasis). The vision of history writing in which everything, including Adolph Hitler, is ambivalent (261) is juxtaposed in the narrative with the quest for the truth pursued by Willie and Lester. The above cited Hanna Wallinger notes that Braithwaite's moral and ethical degeneration is expressed

through the barrenness of the immediate environment in which he lives (Wallinger 178). The imagery employed to depict Braithwaite's surroundings also evokes clear connotations of coldness, death and crippling brought about by old age: "The split-level ranch house was surrounded on three sides by *gnarled willows*, their branches trailing the ground like *bleached skeletal fingers*. They approached the house between low *stone benches* and the *dwarfed* bonsai trees of a Japanese garden holding intricate patterns of *rocks and boulders* that pushed through the *snow-covered dirt*" (Naylor 252, emphasis added). Braithwaite consciously creates and sustains the landscape of barrenness in which he dwells by killing off the willow trees that might partly block his view of the neighborhood.

Braithwaite's and Luther IV Nedeed's cynical, uninvolved approach to reality contrasts sharply with the moral core of the novel constituted by Willie and Lester. As mentioned before, most of the narration is focalized through Willie's point of view and he is endowed with a higher level of sensitivity, a more comprehensive outlook upon reality and more courage to react in critical situations. Willie is the one to be spiritually connected to Willa through his dreams about her and through the voice that he can hear and interprets as pleading for help already before releasing Willa from the basement. Unlike Lester, who is helpless and scared, Willie wants to claim justice for Willa and her dead child rather than simply walk away and leave her behind. He is also the only one to take constructive action to finally elicit a response from passive residents of Linden Hills when Nedeed's house is on fire. The tone for the moral fiber of the narrative is set up during the conversation between both characters, when Lester remembers Grandma Tilson's afore-cited words:

> 'Somebody'll be calling you their father, their husband, their boss—whatever. And it can get confusing, trying to sort all that out, and you can lose yourself in other people's minds. You can forget what you really want and believe. So you keep that mirror and when it's crazy *outside*, you look inside and you'll always know exactly where you are and what you are. And you call that peace.' (59, original emphasis)

Grandma Tilson claims that in order to live in the most luxurious section of Linden Hills, one needs to sell their soul to the devil whose avatar is the father of Luther Nedeed IV, Luther III. Both Willie and Lester focus on the inside, casting away the veneer of the luxury saturating Linden Hills, tempting as it is to them:

> Willie glanced over his shoulder and the sight almost made him stop walking. Infinite rows of rectangular and round windows were sending a mellow glow out into the night. All of Linden Hills stretched up in a magnificent array of colors. The snowy incline was blazing with reds, blues, and greens forming designs everywhere, from circles to each pattern of the constellations.… A lump formed in Willie's throat. God, it was so beautiful it could break your heart. (283)

On the outside, Linden Hills does shine, basking in a dazzling array of lights and colors, overawing a casual passer-by with its external brilliance. Yet a careful observer is quick to notice that this brilliance is nothing but glitter stripped of inner, spiritual light. Dispassionate and uninvolved as Luther IV and Braithwaite are, they still note that there is nothing inside those Linden Hills residents who are steeped in the greatest luxury. According to Luther IV, white Wayne County and black Linden Hills are indistinguishable from each other. Instead of reflecting the soul of Wayne County black, as Luther III intended, Linden Hills becomes "invisible," reflecting nothing but materialistic pottage:

> Linden Hills wasn't black; it was successful. The shining surface of their careers, railings, and cars hurt his [Luther IV's] eyes because it only reflected the bright nothing that was inside of them. Of course Wayne County had lived in peace with Linden Hills for the last two decades, since it now understood that they were both serving the same god. Wayne County had watched his wedge of earth become practically invisible—indistinguishable from their own pathetic souls. (17)

The state of affairs encountered by Luther IV is a fulfillment of the prediction that the neighborhood will be "nothing but light from a hill of carbon dolls" (10), black on one side and white on the other.

Imitative as Linden Hills is of whiteness, it still inverts the visual and spatial representation of success usually portrayed as rising and moving up. In Linden Hills moving up means moving down, towards the most luxurious and prestigious location in the neighborhood known as Tupelo Drive. Not only do the Linden Hills residents invert the popular model of rising towards success, but also the model of African American signifying proposed by Henry Louis Gates. In *The Signifying Monkey* Gates claims that black people signified "nothing on the *x* axis of white signification, and everything on the *y* axis of blackness" (47). A good literary illustration of Gates's theory is the Invisible Man's internal monologue in which he observes: "And that lie that success was a rising *upward*. What a crummy lie they kept us dominated by. Not only could you travel upward toward success but you could travel downward as well; up *and* down, in retreat as well as in advance, crabways and crossways and around in a circle" (Ellison 385). The problem with Linden Hills residents is that, unlike African American signifying figures, they do not just play the game, but wholeheartedly believe in it and therefore become lost in the process. The pursuit of success in a traditional sense of the term not only desensitizes them to the suffering of others, but also drains them of vitality and humanity. As Dr. Braithwaite notes, by the time Linden Hills residents reach the most prestigious location of Tupelo Drive, most of them no longer know what they are really striving for: "Moving in here has simply become the thing to do, the place to be. But to be *what*?" (260, original emphasis). Braithwaite contradicts Grandma Tilson in her statement that Linden Hills residents sold their souls. According to him, "Pieces of themselves were *taken* away" (260,

original emphasis). The narrator is much harsher in her evaluation of Tupelo Drive residents, claiming that moving down in Linden Hills signifies a retreat from humanity, severing of the ties with humanity: "And whenever anyone reached the Tupelo area, they eventually disappeared. Finally, devoured by their own drives, there just wasn't enough humanity left to fill the rooms of a real home, and the property went up for sale" (17-18). There seems to be much more humanity in the run down, underprivileged district of Putney Wayne although Willie has no room of his own. It is strange for Luther IV that no one ever ponders on the availability of space in Linden Hills as well as why and how earlier residents left.

The neighborhood of Linden Hills invites multiple critical comparisons to hell. Naylor herself states that *Linden Hills* is a "refashioning of Dante's *Inferno*" (Loris's Interview with Naylor 254). She also claims to have imitated in *Linden Hills* a terza rima pattern of Dante's *Inferno*: *aba bcb cdc* with images in her book (Loris's Interview with Naylor 262). The most overt comparison of Linden Hills to hell appears at the end of the expository section when the narration is focalized through Luther IV's point of view: "It took over a hundred and fifty years to build what he now had and *it would be a cold day in hell* before he saw some woman tear it down" (Naylor 20, emphasis added). The passage is followed by the narrator's follow-up comment that closes the expository section and foreshadows the opening of the proper action of the novel: "It was cold. In fact, it was the coldest week of the year when White Willie and Shit [Lester] slapped five on Wayne Avenue and began their journey down Linden Hills" (20). According to Christine G. Berg, consecutive drives of Linden Hills represent consecutive circles of hell—the further away from Nedeed's house, the higher the location and the lower the number of the address, the lesser the sins of the residents and the greater the chance of being saved (4). The lowest lying and the most luxurious section of Linden Hills, Tupelo Drive, closest to Nedeed's house located at the very bottom of the neighborhood represents the very bottom of hell from which there is no escape. Berg notes that "Luther Nedeed's burning house only adds to the final infernal image of the Linden Hills community" (16). Catherine C. Ward shifts the focus from the spatial imagery to the psychological and spiritual ramifications evoked by Naylor's narrative: "Naylor's *Linden Hills*, like Dante's Hell, represents not so much a place as a state: the consequences of man's choices" (68). K.A. Sandiford indirectly compares Linden Hills to hell while speaking of Willa's ordeal and the conclusions that she arrives at as a result of her traumatic experiences. According to Sandiford, by declaring that "'There can be no God,'" Willa "defines Linen Hills as a moral universe from which the principle of regular order has removed itself" (135).

At least in some respects the "principle of regular order" might be absent from Linden Hills, but it does not change the fact that its residents follow many of the rituals sanctified by the upper class and the middle class. Naylor's novel presents almost an ethnographic portrayal of Linden Hills. Its residents are definitely of ethnographic interest to street smart Willie K. Mason, who lives in a lower class, if not an underclass area of Putney Wayne. Linden Hills tantalizes him with its luxury and

repels him with its coldness, distance and triteness. The ethnographic description of Linden Hills residents is reinforced by the employment of synecdoche, for which the narrator reaches while defamiliarizing both blackness and whiteness. A synecdochic approach to blackness is visible in the feast scene focalized through Willie's point of view. Watching the residents of Linden Hills in the process of consumption, Willie pictures a tribe of cannibals feasting on "human heads" (123). He does not see whole human beings at the table but merely their body parts: "the utensils worked their way from center to edge, exposing an ear here, a chin there. Parts of a mouth, a set of almond-shaped eyes" (133). Significantly, while fixing the wake guests with an ethnographic gaze, Willie is placed strategically above them, in the spatial position which renders his moral superiority. Rather than be the occasion of commemorating the deceased and comforting the husband, the wake turns into a hot political debate. Willie's impressions of Linden Hills' residents are triggered by their vociferous objections to the new housing project in the vicinity of Linden Hills. The Linden Hills residents objecting to the project declare that an eminent representative of the community, deceased Lycentia Parker would "'do everything [in her power] to keep those dirty niggers out of [their] community'" (133). Unlike Lester, who is livid after hearing those comments and who conveys his indignation to Willie, Willie does not respond verbally, but simply rewinds in his mind an excerpt of Wallace Stevens's poem "Cuisine Bourgeoise": "These days-of-disinheritance, we feast on human heads" (Stevens qtd. in Naylor 133). Notably, the wake guests feast on "brown and bloody meat" (133), implying that Linden Hills residents have a cannibalistic attitude to other African Americans, those who happen to be less privileged than themselves. A clear act of betrayal is not only the refusal to build the housing project in the proximity of Linden Hills, but also the striking of a deal with the white Wayne County Citizens' Alliance, which includes open racists and Ku Klux Klan members. Cannibalistic tendencies of Linden Hills residents can also be traced in the closing lines of Wallace Stevens's poem in which the I-Speaker poses a question: "Is the table a mirror in which they sit and look?/Are they men eating reflections of themselves?" (Stevens cited in Naylor 139). A similar, more covert reflection on the predatory nature of Linden Hills residents is made by Willie earlier in the narrative when he also secretly watches Linden Hills residents during the wedding feast: "They might look like birds of paradise, but they sure ate like vultures" (84).

The imitation of whiteness pursued by Linden Hills and its obsession with making it accounts for an air of artificiality hovering over the neighborhood. Imitating whiteness, it fits into the design of the neighborhood founder, Luther II, who professes the existence of "white money," "white power," "white earth," "white god," "white silver," "white coal," "white railroads," "white steamships," "white oil," white sky (8). Linden Hills residents live in imitated Swiss chalets, British Tudor and Georgian town houses (10). They are interested in marrying lighter and they do not find black waiters good enough to serve them at a party. The presence of exclusively white waiters at a black wedding indicates that black residents of Linden Hills

approach whiteness as a valuable commodity to be pursued and flaunted. Therefore black men invite white companions to the afore-mentioned wedding although on other occasions they date black women. Such behavior time and again earns Linden Hills residents in the narrative the categorization of artificiality. According to Ruth Anderson, "those folks just aren't real" because their life revolves around "making it" (39). Lester concurs with Ruth's portrayal of Linden Hills residents, claiming that "They've lost all touch with what it is to be *them*" (59, original emphasis). The lack of their spontaneity is the most visible at Winston's wedding when all moves of the guests seem to be scripted, prompting Willie to conclude from behind the scenes that he was "watching them watch themselves" (83). Their artificiality is further accentuated by the lack of ease with which they wear their genteel clothes. Having listened to Linden Hills residents defensive argumentation supposed to cover up their prejudice towards underprivileged African Americans, Willie concludes that "these people can't seem to find the guts to be honest about anything" (193). The narrator reflects on Linden Hills propensity to pay homage to appearances by declaring that "If anything was the problem with Linden Hills, it was that nothing seemed to be what it really was" (274).

Ironically, the prosperous residents of Linden Hills imitate whiteness in its surveillance of underprivileged African Americans as well, which is why they immediately notify the police when spotting Willie and Lester walk in the neighborhood, both of whom they identify as strangers. As in the case of upper class white communities, no one is supposed to walk in Linden Hills and no one is supposed to enter uninvited and thus to break trespassing laws. The encounter with the white policemen highlights the panoptic power of whiteness and its ability to control the neighborhood of Linden Hills even though the area is at least to some extent off limits to whites since no whites are allowed to live there by the Nedeeds. The only unstated way to settle in the neighborhood would be to marry into the black family already residing there. The encounter with the police also brings to the fore the ability of whiteness to elicit in African Americans double consciousness. Yet the ethnographic, supervising gaze of whiteness does not remain unchallenged. Drawing the scene, the narrator once again employs synecdoche, but this time in reference to whites, not African Americans. As on the previous occasion when synecdoche was employed, the events are again focalized through Willie's point of view. Stricken with terror, Willie can see only fragments of the policemen's whiteness: "the pale lips," "the white knuckles," "the blue eyes," and the "reflection of his own dark face in those blue irises" (195-196). The eyes of the white policemen receive the greatest attention. They are the instrument of surveillance, but they also become the object of particular scrutiny from Willie. What is the most frightening to Willie is the "reflection of his own dark face" in the "blue irises" of the policeman (195). The policeman's gaze sets in motion Willie's double-consciousness. Mature and thoughtful as Willie is, he has not found yet the inner peace that Grandma Tilson speaks about in her life motto that she passes down to future generations. Double-consciousness and a fear of literally

losing his face plague Willie throughout his dreams. In one of his nightmares he is afraid that he will see an empty space in the mirror instead of his face. Reflecting on the encounter with the police, Willie retorts to belligerent Lester, who, as a resident of Linden Hills, refuses to fit into the role of a cooperating, obedient subject and dares to talk back to the policeman: "It wasn't what he [the policeman] thought he was, but what he thought we were… a couple of unidentified niggers" (199). Significantly, the policeman sizes up Lester's material worth, paying special attention to his "sheepskin coat, suede gloves and leather boots," all of which contrast with Willie's pea jacket, implying Lester's higher social standing. Ultimately, the policemen's gaze of surveillance is successfully returned by Norman Anderson, who claims liaison to the District Attorney's office and who deliberately stares at the officer's badge number.

　　　White policemen's gaze of surveillance is not the sole source of double consciousness experienced by Willie. Black individuals of higher social rank than himself have equal power to shatter his confidence and trigger a measure of discomfort. Willie becomes the object of ethnographic interest from other African Americans primarily because of his extremely black skin color. His nickname "White" is a pun on his very black skin, so black that in childhood he is afraid that the sun will make him white. On the one hand, as a member of the black cultural nationalist movement, he is proud of his phenotypic features, yet on the other, he is clearly discomfited by the stares that he receives from other African Americans. He feels his blackness intensified in the presence of yellow-skinned Mrs. Tilson: "Willie always felt big and awkward and black around this delicate, yellow woman" (48). He also "grow[s] uncomfortable under [Dr. Braithwaite's] bland stare" (251). The most problematic for Willie is the gaze with which he is fixed repeatedly by Luther Nedeed IV. First he is under an impression that "he had been caught watching" Nedeed surreptitiously in the chapel while the latter was seeing to Lycentia Parker's body (185).[2] At his own home Nedeed is "content to sit and watch Willie" (291). On one occasion Nedeed is metaphorically X-raying Willie's body: "It seemed to take a slow age for Luther's eyes to move over Willie's body. No, it was more like moving through his body, well beneath the tissues that covered his internal organs" (214). Gates discerns overtones of homoeroticism, going to the point of calling it an "ocular rape" ("Significant Others" 611). Like his ancestors, Luther Nedeed IV indeed seems to treat his marriage to Willa instrumentally, approaching sexual encounters mechanically, mostly as a source of impregnation in the right phase of the Moon and hence procuring an heir who will be a copy of himself. Yet considering that Nedeed's efforts go awry and the child is phenotypically white, his visual fascination with Willie may be interpreted

---

2   It is never stated what Willie saw in the chapel, but there is a strong hint that Nedeed might have committed some necrophilic acts upon Lycentia Parker's body. The hint is corroborated by Grandma's Tilson's earlier claim that one of the older Nedeeds was interested in purchasing catfish heads from her, but she would not sell them to him because she knew what he needed them for. K.A. Sandiford speculates that he placed catfish heads inside female vaginas (124-125).

as a gaze of envy and appreciation for a "darker-hued gentleman" (192), representing his dream son, an external inversion of his own son, whom he disclaims because of his whiteness. It is not without significance that Nedeed's intense gazing upon Willie takes place when he is preoccupied with the fate and legacy of the Nedeeds because his son's whiteness equals for Nedeed the "destruction of five generations" (18).

Analyzing blackness and whiteness in *Linden Hills*, it is impossible to omit the dynasty of the Nedeeds and their relation to whiteness and blackness. Luther Nedeed II, the founder of Linden Hills professes the existence of "white money," "white power," "white earth," "white god," "white silver," "white coal," "white railroads," "white steamships," "white oil," white sky (8). His father, Luther I, builds a white clapboard house, which symbolically amplifies the Nedeeds' relation to whiteness and is a further manifestation of the association of whiteness with power, which all of the Nedeeds crave. All of the Nedeeds in the dynasty also falsely believe that the earth belongs to them rather than they to the earth: "They looked at the earth, the sea, and the sky … and mistook those who were owned by it as the owners" (16). Unlike his ancestors, the last Nedeed in the dynasty, Luther IV, claims that God is colorless, not white, because the Almighty is nothing more but the "will to possess" (16-17). Therefore according to Nedeed, God knows no color bar because the will to possess is common to all human beings.

Luther Nedeed IV's own relation to whiteness is ambivalent. As mentioned earlier, he is fascinated with Willie's very dark phenotypic features. Unlike his ancestors, who chose octoroon light-skinned wives, Luther marries a woman "a dull brown shadow" (18). Equating whiteness with invisibility, Luther IV claims that his ancestors married light-skinned women because they would easily disappear "against the whitewashed boards of the Nedeed home" after giving birth to a male heir (18). All of the Nedeed women become figuratively nameless and invisible after entering the Nedeed family. The same fate would encounter Willa Nedeed if not for the fact that her story is articulated in the narrative. Willa also recuperates the stories of other Nedeed wives and mothers, exercising considerable agency at the end of the novel by inadvertently putting an end to the Nedeed dynasty and thus debunking Luther IV's claim that "there must always be Nedeeds" (288). Patriarchy of the Nedeeds' household is one of the cornerstones on which they build the neighborhood of Linden Hills. So is their ostensibly unswerving commitment to heterosexuality. Hence Luther IV's staunch opposition to Winston's homosexual relationship with David and the role that he plays at Winston's wedding. Only after formalizing an arranged heterosexual relationship, does Winston become worthy of living in the "promised land" of Tupelo Drive.

While for Luther Willa eventually becomes a "shadow floating through the carpeted rooms," his phenotypically white son also "faded against the [white] clapboards of Tupelo Drive" (19). As in the case of William Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, Luther Nedeed IV's envisioned heritage and design go awry. Luther's son is depicted as "ghostly presence that mocked everything that his fathers had built" (18). Considering

that "ghost" is the term often applied by black people in reference to white people, "ghostly" reinforces the son's relation to whiteness. If Nedeed's son is to guarantee the Nedeeds' legacy, it is quite significant that the son is born phenotypically white because that is in fact what the Nedeeds end up creating—the neighborhood that, through Luther IV's own admission is "indistinguishable" from the white residential area of Wayne County (17). In the Nedeeds' design the son was to be the visible sign and guarantor of the Nedeeds' heritage, power and legacy—"the stamp and will of the father" (18). It is not without significance that it is Luther IV, rather than any of his ancestors, that has a phenotypically white son because he is the one to strip his ancestors' vision of whatever idealism it originally entailed and to put a final stamp of uniformization of Linden Hills with equivalent white residential neighborhoods. He is also the one to forge an alliance with the racist Citizens' Alliance of Wayne County. Luther's nameless son is by no means the only instance of a phenotypically white child in African American literature. One of the earliest examples of the trope dates back to Sutton Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1889), a black nationalist novel. Like Luther Nedeed, one of the two major protagonists of the novel, Belton, the African American father of the white born child, also displays ignorance which tells him to suspect his wife's infidelity rather than blame the phenotypic whiteness of the child on the genetic mischief. While devastated Belton leaves the family, sadistic Luther imprisons the wife together with the child. Different as both cases are, both exemplify narrative irony and can be read as a tool employed by the narrators of both works, a tool that is supposed to cast a shadow of doubt on their protagonists' professed commitment to "blackness" and "black identity." The knowledge of such white births to exclusively black parents was well established in black communities and was passed down from one generation to another. It was common knowledge in African American communities that phenotypically black parents could have a phenotypically white child, but phenotypically white parents could not have a phenotypically black child.

As Linden Hills conjures up the associations of hell, Luther IV invites connotations of hell, the devil and death. Seeing the Nedeeds' house for the first time, Willie perceives it as a dead place, finding it difficult to imagine the site as vibrant with life, children's play or laughter (266). The interior of the house prompts Willie to think of Heathcliffe's mansion: "it was like walking into a movie set for *Wuthering Heights*" (290). Lester maliciously associates Luther exclusively with the funeral: "you sorta surprised us this time since there's no funeral going on" (212). The most overt references to Luther IV as the devil appear in connection with the suffering inflicted on Willa and their child. The most explicit public comparisons of Luther to the devil are made by his chief antagonist in the narrative—Reverend Hollis. Barely stopping from calling Luther the devil directly, Hollis claims that if one ran a rope from his house to that of the Nedeeds, it would have to "be fireproof when it gets to the end of Tupelo Drive [the location of Luther's house]" (171). Luther clearly derives a necrophilic pleasure out of the contact with dead bodies, especially from surveying the final product of his work: "Even now, in the chapel, looking at

the results of his labor sent a pleasant sensation through the base of his stomach. She [Lycentia Parker] was perfect. And what was the point in living if a man didn't love his work?" (185). According to Nedeed, he elevates the job of a mortician to the level of art, priding himself on learning the minutiae of the discipline from his ancestors who cherished the arcane of their knowledge, never trusting external sources. Luther also pictures himself as a kind of demiurge-like figure that creates a woman anew: "it took gentleness and care to turn what was under your hands into a woman" (185). K.A. Sandiford calls Luther "the consummate gothic technician" (125), noting at the same time that he represents the real hell that Grandma Tilson apothegizes by telling Lester that there is hell on earth (136). Wallinger designates the dynasty of the Nedeeds as "the Satans or anti-Christs of Linden Hills" (174). Berg calls Luther a "modern-day Lucifer" (4), a label with which Moore concurs by identifying Luther as Lucifer of Eden (1414). Moore arrives at the above mentioned classification through the etymological analysis of Luther's last name. Spelled from the end, "Nedeed" results in de-Eden, which Moore reformulates as Lucifer de Eden.

The analysis of the defamiliarization of whiteness and blackness in *Linden Hills* would not be complete without noting the correspondence between the whiteness to which Linden Hills in various ways aspires and the narrative imagery of the work that time and again invokes whiteness. Quite significantly, the season of the year in which the events unfold is winter, the time of all enveloping whiteness. Linden Hills is presented as hidden behind a "solid white wall" of snow. The "white wall of snow" is evocative of the relation of the neighborhood to white privilege and its physical and mental separation from the rest of the black community. It also stands in opposition to Kenneth Clark's "invisible walls" of the ghetto. The "solid white wall" of snow and haze fortifies the fence of the most affluent section of Linden Hills—Tupelo Drive (194). Whiteness enfolding Linden Hills is indicative of aspirations of its inhabitants, who were "constantly painting and whitewashing" (11), running over their past instead of building on it. The neighborhood of Linden Hills begins with the Nedeeds' white clapboard house and when the Nedeeds' personal, family design in the end goes up in smoke, "the Nedeed home was a pile of charred wood" (303). Whiteness also appears in the narrative imagery in reference to Willie and Willa, both of whom are rendered as to some extent akin to each other. White fingers lure Willie "White" to eat Nedeed's cake in his dream. Like all Nedeed women, Willa is presented as fading into the background and out of the picture in the family photographs. When she emerges from the basement, she is "wrapped in sheer white lace" (298). While staying in the basement she wraps up the family Bible in the white wedding veil worn by one of the preceding Nedeed women. Later she wraps the body of her child in the same veil. When Willie and Lester follow Luther's command in their bewildered fear and leave Luther and Willa alone in the house, wondering what to do, the narrator comments tersely that "there would have been no question of smashing in that door if their world were still governed by the rules of cowboys and Indians, knights and dragons—black and white" (299).

Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills* complicates the view of blackness, illustrating what happens to the African American community that desperately tries to match the norm set by whiteness. Although white people barely appear in the narrative, whiteness still wields enormous power to exert a controlling influence on the Linden Hills neighborhood that ostensibly bans whites from permanent residence. African Americans residing in the area may bar whites from legally sharing in their property, but they help to sustain the self-created normativity of whiteness through the fetishization of white standards and norms as well as by participating in the ostracism of underprivileged African Americans. For some inhabitants of Linden Hills the imitation of whiteness turns out to be literally fatal, for others it is figuratively fatal, destroying their moral and cultural underpinnings. Most are oblivious to the fact that there is a third way, the space in between what came to be figuratively labeled as "black" or "white," the "middle ground" that Lester speaks about to Willie: "Maybe there's a middle ground somewhere.… I don't know why it must be one or the other—ya know, ditchdigger or duke. But people always think that way: it's Linden Hills or nothing. But it doesn't have to be Linden Hills and it doesn't have to be nothing.… There *are* other places to live" (283, original emphasis). In their relative immaturity Willie and Lester are still mature enough to know that the Nedeeds and their followers have an illusion of controlling reality while they really become trapped in someone else's design, seemingly pursuing their own. The open-ended structure of *Linden Hills* does not clearly articulate the "middle ground" Willie and Lester are striving for, but it clearly points to what they are going to reject.

Works Cited

Bhabha, Homi K. "Of Mimicry and Man. The Ambivalence of Colonial Difference." *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. 85-92. Print.

Berg, Christine G. "Light from a Hill of Carbon Paper Dolls:" Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills* and Dante's *Inferno*." *Modern Language Studies* 29.2 (Autumn 1999): 1-19. Print.

Clark, Kenneth. *Dark Ghetto*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965. Print.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903]. New York: Penguin, 1989. Print.

———. "The Souls of White Folk." W.E.B Du Bois. *Writings*. Ed. Nathan Huggins. New York: Library of America, 1986. 923- 938. Print.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man* [1952]. New York: Vintage, 1972. Print.

Gates, Henry Louis. "Significant Others." *Contemporary Literature* 29.4 (Winter 1988): 606-623. Print.

———. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. Print.

Griggs, Sutton. *Imperium in Imperio* [1889]. Milwaukee, WI: Greenbook Publications, 2010. Print.

Harris, Cheryl. "Whiteness as Property." *The Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (1993):

1709-1791. Print.

Huggan, Graham. "(Post)Colonialism, Anthropology, and the Magic of Mimesis." *Cultural Critique* 38 (Winter 1998): 91-106. Print.

Loris, Michelle C. "Interview: 'The Human Spirit is a Kick-Ass Thing." *The Critical Response to Gloria Naylor*. Ed. Sharon Felton and Michelle C. Lorris. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997. 253-263. Print.

Moore, John Noell. "Myth, Fairy Tale, Epic, and Romance: Narrative as Re-Vision in *Linden Hills*." *Callaloo* 23.4 (Autumn 2000): 1410-1429. Print.

Naylor, Gloria. *Linden Hills* [1985]. New York: Penguin, 1986. Print.

Roy, Parama. "Oriental Exhibits: Englishmen and Natives in Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*". *boundary 2* 22.1 (1995): 185-202. Print.

Sandiford, K.A. "Gothic and Intertextual Constructions in *Linden Hills*." *Arizona Quarterly* 47.3 (Autumn 1991): 117-139. Print.

Wallinger, Hanna. "Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*: The Novel by an African American Woman Writer and the Critical Discourse." *Moderne Sprachen* 37.3 (1993): 172-186. Print.

Ward, Catherine C. "Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*: A Modern 'Inferno.'" *Contemporary Literature* 28.1 (Spring 1987): 67-81. Print.

Paulina Ambroży

Performance and Theatrical Affect
in Steven Millhauser's Short Story
"The Knife-Thrower"

Abstract: Audiences and performances figure prominently in Steven Millhauser's short stories whose plots are often structured around some form of public entertainment (e.g. magic or freak shows, museum displays or automaton dramas). "The Knife Thrower," "August Eschenberg," "The New Automaton Theater" or "The Dream of the Consortium," to name only a few of his numerous "theatrical" pieces, use performance to explore the relation between the figure of a charismatic artist and his spectators. As will be shown in close reading of "The Knife Thrower," the writer's representation of a magician's performance is complexified through his choice of a plural narrative voice which creates a unique subject position for his fictional audiences. Another aspect of the theatrical mode in Millhauser's story is that the narrative is informed by the tension between stage and offstage realities, with the dramas often "bleeding" into reality and contaminating the characters' everyday lives. The aim of my inquiry is to look into the aesthetic and moral implications of Millhauser's use and abuse of performative codes, with a special focus on the role of the collective narrator, the relation between production and reception of art and dramatizations of the porous boundaries between performance and life. The methodological angle adopted for the analysis derives from affective studies of theatrical experience.

Keywords: Steven Millhauser, American short story, performance, audience, theatrical feeling, plural narrator

The intention of this article is to examine the relationship between artistic performance and its audiences, as thematized and represented in Steven Millhauser's short story "The Knife Thrower" from his collection *The Knife Thrower and Other Stories* (1998). Although the source material for the inquiry can be found in numerous texts of the author, "The Knife Thrower," in my view, best exemplifies Millhauser's use of style, structure and narrative perspective to create a space which intertwines aesthetic distance and collective feeling—both central to the categories of theatrical affect which have been adopted as the dominant methodological angle for the following analysis.

As pointed out by his critics,[1] Millhauser's popular reception in the American literary tradition has been surprisingly slow, capricious, if not reluctant, and many

---

1   See for instance Marc Chénetier's introduction to *Steven Millhauser: La précision d'impossible*; Douglas Fowler's essay "Steven Millhauser: The Minaturist," and Alexander et al.

aspects of his oeuvre, including its obsessive engagements with the issues of art and theatricality, have remained underresearched. Although the writer debuted in 1972 and since then has published four novels, numerous short stories, three volumes of novellas and won the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Martin Dressler: A Tale of An American Dreamer,* he has remained on the margins of the post-war American canon and keeps escaping critical categorizations as well as popular attention (Alexander et al, 7-9). As observed by one of Millhauser's critics, Douglas Fowler, "[i]t would be difficult to name a writer more exotic, fey, perversely playful, allusive, literary, structurally elaborate, and philosophically speculative than Millhauser" (5). In a review of *We Others,* the collection of Millhauser's new and old stories, Jonathan Lethem thus defines his "protean" practice: "his characteristic method mingles dreamlike and often morbid or perverse fantasies with meticulous realist observation"; "his prose temperature is coolly feverish, drawing equally on Nabokovian rapture, Borgesian enigma and the plain-spoken white-picket-fence wistfulness of Sherwood Anderson" (np). Described by J.D. O'Hara as a "Mandarin" stylist, whose dense, descriptive form goes against the most recent taste shaped largely by the minimalist, Hemingwayesque tradition of the American short story (O'Hara cited in Alexander et al., 7), the author is still waiting for a wider and more sustained critical recognition.

The select group of contemporary critics interested in Millhauser's work has found three major keys to classify and contextualize his unique style and literary practice: the Gothic/fantastic, magic-realist and postmodernist. "The quasi-Gothic hauntedness" of his fiction, and his frequent use of the fantastic, as observed by Alicita Rodríguez, reveals the writer's indebtedness to the Gothic short story tradition of Melville, Hawthorne, Poe, James and Lovecraft (Rodríguez in Alexander et al., 7). Indeed, claiming that the writer's work "exceeds realism," Marc Chénetier has proposed to read it in terms of "a mimesis of the fantastic" (in Alexander et al. 10-11). Due to his frequent use of irony, his revisionist approach to literary conventions, visible, among others, in a multi-layered allusiveness, inter- and meta-textuality of his prose, as well as his strong "predilection for the fabulous and self-delightedly artificial" (Fowler 146), Millhauser is often linked with the experimental tradition of modernist and postmodernist fiction—e.g. Franz Kafka, Jorge Louis Borges, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Vladimir Nabokov, or Robert Coover. Interestingly, however, his "intellectually and linguistically complex" (J. D. O'Hara in Alexander et al., 7) works have never received popular attention comparable to the one enjoyed by his contemporaries. The only monograph in English is Earl Ingersoll's recent *Understanding Steven Millhauser* (2014); there is one more book-length study in French, and, somewhat curiously, it is France which has given Millhauser a more sustained critical acclaim, making the collection *Knife Thrower and Other Stories* part of the French national teacher examination program, which certifies secondary-school teachers in specialized areas (Alexander et al., 7). Remarkably, this recognition further links Millhauser's reception to that of another unique stylist in the American canon—Edgar Allan Poe—whose work was also championed by French poets of the

Fin de Siècle before it entered the consciousness of American critics and readers.

The element which binds all of the above contexts and traditions is the heightened focus on the role of art and artists, and this issue will be the main subject of the present inquiry. Artists, performers and writers belong to Millhauser's favorite protagonists, and his novels could easily fit into the category of a *Künstlerroman*.[2] What is more important for the present analysis, however, is that Millhauser's work frequently foregrounds aspects, metaphors and themes of theatricality and performance. As observed by Pedro Ponce, who studied the topic more broadly in his article "'A game we no longer understood': Theatrical Audiences in the Fiction of Steven Millhauser," audiences, theatrical settings and performances figure prominently in his short stories, whose plots are usually structured around some form of public entertainment (e.g. magic or freak shows, museum displays or automaton dramas) (91). The stories such as "In the Penny Arcade," "The Knife Thrower," "Eisenheim the Illusionist," "August Eschenberg," "The New Automaton Theater" or "The Dream of the Consortium," to name only a few of Millhauser's numerous "theatrical" pieces, feature diverse forms of spectacles and displays, using performance to problematize the relation between the figure of a charismatic artist and his spectators.

The particular focus of my own investigation of the selected aspects of "theatricality" in Millhauser's prose is the distribution of affect between the stage and the auditorium and the possible functions of "emotional labour" provoked by artistic performance. Those issues will be exemplified by a close analysis of the short story "The Knife Thrower." As indicated above, I shall employ the terminology and methods of affective studies related to the nature of emotion in theatrical performance, as they offer a particularly productive paradigm for an interrogation of the complexity of the audience's responses within and beyond the space of an artistic spectacle. As will be shown in the following argument, Millhauser's meticulous and mesmerizing dramatizations of performance, coupled with a frequent use of theatrical conventions, metaphors, mechanisms and scripts, create a unique emotional space and subject position for his audiences as well as readers. This position, enhanced by his choice of a plural narrative voice, is used by the author of *Martin Dressler* to problematize a dubious nature of human morality and the ethics of participation. Another aspect of the theatrical mode in Millhauser's stories, as pointed out by Ponce, is that the narratives are informed by the tension between stage and offstage realities, with the dramas often haunting and contaminating the characters' lives (94). Creating a form of "theatrical continuum" which entails diverse social rituals and practices, the stories

---

2   For example, his first novel, *Edwin Mulhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer, 1943-1954, by Jeffrey Cartwright* (1972) as well as his second novel, *Portrait of a Romantic* (1977), are parodies of a nineteenth-century literary biography and memoir, respectively; whereas his Pulitzer winning *Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer* (1996) is a story of a visionary entrepreneur, the eponymous Martin Dressler, who turns his business ventures into fantastic artistic projects exceeding the limits of imagination.

reveal how communal values and attitudes both "assert and question themselves" (Jen Harvie and Dan Rebellato vii). Thus, the aim of my study is to look into the aesthetic and moral implications of Millhauser's use of performative codes, with a special focus on the role of the collective narrator, the relation between production and reception of art and dramatizations as well as functions of the porous boundaries between performance and life.

According to Ridout, who studied the relationship between theatre and feeling in his 2007 book *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems,* theatre is "an affect machine" which creates "hothouse conditions" for the collective emotion. According to the critic, theatre helps us feel even when it is not trying, when the designs, acting and lighting fails. Actors conjure emotions on stage, lighting designers create color and light effects, sound designers and musicians similarly work to evoke an emotional mood (Ridout in Hurley 7-9). The affective impact of a performance which opens up a space of "heated intersubjectivity" (Hurley 9) is thus inevitable—theatre makes, manages and moves feeling, captivating our imagination and stimulating affective responses. As noted by Hurley in *Theatre and Feeling* (2010)*,* "theatre's emotional labour also performs social work," for "via the work of feeling theatre intervenes in how we as a society come to understand ourselves, our values, our social world" (10). Erika Fischer-Lichte defines this relation in her influential study *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, using the term "autopoietic feedback loop" which "ties the living process of the theatrical event back to the fundamental processes of life itself " (Fisher-Lichte in Carson 8).[3]

In "The Knife Thrower" (1998), the story which has been chosen for the present analysis, Millhauser explores this affective and social potential of performance, using the language of description, narrative perspective and structure to serve his purpose. The author employs a popular form of entertainment, which is frequently the case in his tales (see for example "Eisenheim the Illusionist" whose main protagonist is a magician); here it is a knife-throwing show in which the charismatic and somewhat notorious artist captivates his audience by a series of ever-more daring challenges. Hensch, for this is the name of the artist, is "an acknowledged master of his art"[4], and, as the narrator tells us further on, his shows are surrounded by an aura of mystery and transgression because of a certain propensity to "step boldly… over the line never before crossed by knife throwers" ("The Knife Thrower" 287).

For the effect of a concentrated feeling, the narrative in "The Knife Thrower" preserves the Aristotelian unity of time and space and it is carefully structured to

---

3   The studies dealing with the cognitive and behavioral approaches to "theatrical emotion" have been kindly suggested to me by dr. Dagmara Krzyżaniak, who works in the field of theatre and drama studies at the Faculty of English of Adam Mickiewicz University. I wish to thank her for her generous assistance and for allowing me to peruse her private library for the purpose of this article.

4   All the quotations from Millhauser's short stories come from the collection *We Others: New and Selected Stories* (2011).

follow the rhythm and design of a live performance. For most of the story, Millhauser keeps his audience within the circumscribed space of the theatre, masterfully playing on the audience's and the readers' expectations as the story moves from the excited anticipation of the show, through a series of suspenseful moments towards its dark and highly ambiguous climax. The power of the enchantment is reinforced by the author's meticulous rendering of the knife thrower's virtuosity in increasingly more daring challenges. The descriptions, in which there are no spare words, have a truly mesmerizing effect, as they skillfully capture the atmosphere of excitement and the performers' movements onstage, seducing the reader with their mimetic force and delight in atmospheric detail. This is visible, for example, in the presentation of Hensch's assistant:

> Long-legged and smiling, she stepped from the fallen gown and stood before the black partition in a spangled silver leotard. We thought of tightrope walkers, bareback riders, hot circus tents on the blue summer days. The pale yellow hair, the spangled cloth, the pale skin touched here and there with shadow, all this gave her the remote, enclosed look of a work of art, while at the same time, it lent her a kind of cool voluptuousness, for the metallic glitter of her costume seemed to draw attention to the bareness of her skin, disturbingly unhidden, dangerously white and cool and soft. (285)

The description, a work of exceptional craftsmanship itself, beautifully substantiates the entire scene for the reader, orchestrating the woman's strong sensual impact with the viewers' desires, memories and expectations. The latter, as shown in the fragment, are informed by a peculiar mixture of erotic attraction and nostalgic longing for childhood innocence—"the blue summer days," filled with "the smell of sawdust and cotton candy" (284). The musical rhythm of the passage, created by repetitive, paratactic structures and catalogues[5] which simultaneously move the narrative forward and stall it through an interplay of difference and repetition, enhance the hypnotic, trans-like effect of the spectacle.

Using the dynamic shifts of perspective between the actions on stage and the audience's collective response, Millhauser not only focalizes the spectators' attention, making their fascination and engagement "eerily palpable," as aptly put by Pedro Ponce (103), but works also to exhibit the dynamics of collective desire, here channeled and intensified by the increasingly artful performance. The following passage, describing the opening stages of the show, nicely captures Millhauser's hyperrealist technique:

> Abruptly, Hensch strode to the centre of the stage and turned to face us. His assistant pushed the table with its box of knives to his side. She left the stage and returned pushing a second table, which she placed at his

---

5   Millhauser's peculiar penchant for repetition and cataloguing has been explored, among others, by Cecile Roudeau (2004) and Arthur M. Saltzman (1996).

> other side. She stepped away, into half-darkness, while the lights shone directly on Hensch and his tables. We saw him place his left hand palm up on the empty table top. With his right hand he removed the knife from the box on the first table. Suddenly, without looking, he tossed the knife straight up into the air. We saw it rise to its rest and come hurtling down. Someone cried out as it struck his palm, but Hensch raised his hand from the table and held it up for us to see, turning it first one way and then the other: the knife had struck between his fingers. Hensch lowered his hand over the knife so that the blade stuck up between his second and third fingers. He tossed three more knives into the air, one after the other: rat-tat-tat they struck the table. From the shadows the woman in white stepped forward and topped the table towards us, so that we could see the four knives sticking between his fingers.
>
> Oh, we admired Hensch, we were taken with the man's fine daring; and yet, as we pounded out our applause, we felt a little restless, a little dissatisfied, as if some unspoken promise had failed to be kept. For hadn't we been a trifle ashamed of ourselves for attending the performance, hadn't we deplored in advance his unsavoury antics, his questionable crossing of the line? (284)

As noted by Marc Chénetier, who has been one of the devoted French champions of Millhauser's fiction, "through the simple sharing of a sustained exercise of concentration, the writings of Steven Millhauser alter one's vision" (*Le précision* 88). Indeed, the intense focus of the descriptions leading us through the ever more dangerous demonstrations of Hensch's skill probe the emotional boundaries of both the fictional audience and the readers, inviting us to participate and become complicit in the artist's transgressive game.

In the fictional reality of the tale, this game involves getting a signatorial "mark of blood," a memento of the performance in the form of a physical wound. The first "target" is a butterfly which the knife thrower "drove against the wood, where those in the front rows could see the wings helplessly beating" (7). However, with the progression of the show, Hensch moves to human subjects, targeting his assistant's hands and neck, which produces "red trickle, which ran down to her shoulder" (11), to finally turn to the members of the audience. The first volunteer, the young woman named Susan Parker, is just grazed by the knife:

> Hensch lifted a knife and threw. We heard the muffled bang of the blade, heard Susan Parker's sharp little gasp, saw her other hand clench into a fist. Quickly the dark woman stepped in front of her and pulsed out the knife; and turning to us she lifted Susan Parker's arm, and displayed for us a streak of red on the pale forearm." (285).

But the violence increases with the second volunteer who receives "a memento" in the form of a deeper wound straight through his hand. The reaction of the audience is

structured by an instinctive anticipation of a potential entropy and voyeuristic wish to see more violence and more blood-letting:

> Even as the performance seemed to taunt us with the promise of danger, of a disturbing turn that should not be permitted, or even imagined, we reminded ourselves that the master had so far done nothing but scratch a bit of skin, that his act was after all public and well travelled, that the boy appeared calm; and though we disapproved of the exaggerated effect of the lighting, the crude melodrama of it all, we secretly admired the skill which the performance played on our fears. What it was we feared exactly, we didn't know, couldn't say. But there was the knife thrower bathed in blood-light, there was the pale victim manacled to a wall; in the shadows the dark woman; and in the glare of the lighting, in the silence, in the very rhythm of the evening, the promise of entering a dark dream. (289)

The plural perspective, the we-narrator, has a curious emotional effect, creating a unique "sensory ecology," to borrow from Martin Welton, allowing a feeling of one kind to "nest within others" (105). Similarly, in *Emotional Contagion*, Elaine Hatfield et al. observe that people "synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person, and consequently... converge emotionally" (5). "An important consequence of emotional contagion," the critics argue further on, "is an attentional, emotional, and behavioral synchrony that has the same adaptive utility (and drawbacks) for social entities (dyads, groups) as has emotion for the individual" (5). Millhauser demonstrates the dangerous power of such emotional convergence: in "The Knife Thrower," it results in the silent witnessing, succumbing to and consumption of violence by the audience. There is no restorative, supplementary faculty of emotion in the story which would take the reader to the safer sphere of subjective truth and individual reflection; instead we are drawn into a collective experience of a growing nightmare—"the realm of forbidden things" ("The Knife Thrower," 286)—which leads to the macabre escalation of injury, violence and suffering until the climatic open ending—"the ultimate sacrifice" which is the mortal wounding of the last volunteer (or what seems to be a mortal wound, because the ending remains unresolved, leaving both the fictional and actual audience in a state of uncertainty as to what had really happened).

The we-vision, which leads to the intersubjective blending of emotion, but also includes each individual consciousness, has a deep moral dimension for Millhauser. In an interview with Chénetier, the writer thus explains his preference for the we-narrator:

> What interests me (about the 'we' perspective) is the way moral indecisiveness or questioning may be given more weight or significance by attaching itself to a multiple being. A single narrator might have multiple interpretations of an event, or might try to evade moral choice in numerous ways, but the same kind of uncertainty in an entire community becomes public, societal, even political, and carries a different weight.

I would argue that the moral wavering of the 'we' in 'The Knife Thrower'
is more disturbing than the moral wavering of an 'I' would have been, or
disturbing in a different way. (Millhauser in Chénetier, "Interview" np)

The we-narrator, the writer adds further on, "acts rather like a chorus, a mysterious
plurality chanting in unison." The chorus simile is developed by Millhauser, who
traces back the origin of his mode to "the chorus in Greek tragedy":

I found myself increasingly drawn to this pronoun… because it allowed
me to enact the drama of an entire community set against a person or
group that threatens it, and… because the pronoun felt new and exciting,
a pronoun that didn't drag in its wake one hundred billion stories, as in the
case of an 'I' or a 'he.' It strikes me as a barely explored pronoun, full of
possibilities. (Chénetier, "Interview" np)

As noted by Ruth Maxey, who explores the recent popularity of the plural narrator
in American fiction, "[a]s a formal device, the first-person plural narrator is both
enigmatic and technically demanding; and historically it has been rare in US fiction.
After all, who is 'we' in the United States?" "The first-person plural narrator," the
critic continues, represents a paradoxical, mysterious and unsettling voice which is
inclusive and exclusive, everyone and no-one, all-seeing yet strictly limited" (Maxey
np). Evoking the collectivity of experience and the conformity of the spectators, the
plural first person implicates the reader as an addressee (Maxey np) and, in "The
Knife Thrower," also as a participant in Hensch's displays of violence. As observed
by Maxey, the polysemic narrator "lends the collective atmosphere of the story
a sinister sense of mass indoctrination: the 'we' of a cult." "We" functions as a "mask,"
as the author proposes (Millhauser in Chénetier, "Interview" np); it serve to "show
unity and togetherness and a way for individual I voices [and moral responsibilities]
to hide" (Maxey np). The contagious convergence of reactions puts a pressure on
individual participants who might have doubts about Hensch's penchant for crossing
acceptable boundaries but who seek explanation in the "art" of illusion, absolving
themselves from the consideration of the show's grim outcome.

    In *Moving Viewers,* a study of the spectator's experience in film, Carl
Plantinga has coined a useful term "artifact emotion," which should be distinguished
from "fiction emotion" (74). The latter is related to the emotions evoked by the
fictional narrative; whereas the former emerges in reaction to the artificial status of
the spectacle, when the spectators step back from their involvement in the fictional
reality of the performance, "unblending their actor/character integrations to enjoy
performances in other ways" (Plantinga 74). The audience's diverse reactions and the
ironic tone of some comments in the story also exhibit instances of such "unblending"
and recognition of artifice, as in the remarks that the knife thrower "had the right to
develop his art," or that "the final act had probably been a set-up, the girl had probably
leaped smiling to her feet after the curtain fell down" ("The Knife Thrower" 291).

However, the powerful "mystique" of the knife thrower and his assistant, as well as the open ending of the spectacle, which merges with the ending of the tale, leaves the audience and the reader emotionally disturbed and uneasy: "Black against black they stood there, she and he, bound now it seemed in a dark pact, as if she were his twin sister, or as if both were on the same side in a game we were all playing, a game we no longer understood" (287). The spectacle performed by "the black master and his pale maiden" (285) produces a sensation of unreality which conceals and neutralizes the dark costs of the audience's enchantment; at the same time, however, the show's quasi-occult atmosphere, repeatedly stressed by the Gothic mise-en-scène, props and light effects, unsettles the viewers.

According to Pedro Ponce, "[if] there is one thing linking the spectators present at Millhauser's magic shows, automaton dramas, and other entertainments, it is the experience of leaving the theatre – or, more accurately, trying and failing to leave the theatre" (94). And indeed, although Hensch's audience leaves the auditorium, it cannot quite shake off the unsettling effect of the show:

> But when all was said and done, when the pros and cons were weighted and every issue carefully considered, we couldn't help feeling that the knife thrower had really gone too far. After all, if such performances were encouraged, if they were even tolerated, what might we expect in the future? Would any of us be safe? The more we thought about it, the more uneasy we became, and in the nights that followed, when we woke from troubling dreams, we remembered the travelling knife thrower with agitation and dismay. ("Knife Thrower" 289)

The experience has "shattered the safe boundaries" between life and illusion (Ponce 94), with the "troubling dreams" becoming an extension of the "dark dream" the audience has collectively succumbed to during Hensch's performance. The irony of the situation which Millhauser skillfully plays off here resounds in the question "would any of us be safe"?—the true portent of it lies in the audience's immediate implication in Hensch's daring acts—after all, despite the growing confusion, doubt and anxiety, no one has protested against the escalation of violence onstage, even when they heard the young woman's cry and realized that there was no sound of the knife hitting the wooden partition against which she was placed. Thus, the question "would any of us be safe?" and the remark "if they [transgressions] were even tolerated" strike a deeper cord—as they reveal the audience's "abdication of responsibility" (Ponce 104) and remaining in a convenient denial about their own involvement in the performance based on the collective "consumption" of violence. As aptly summed up by Ponce, "Hensch gives the people what they want, however much they refuse to admit it" (102). The narrative reveals thus the doubleness of the human spirit expressed in the interweaving of the shared communal entertainment (which subtly moves towards a ritualistic sacrifice of the selected volunteers)—and the cruelty of the community's complacency and silence after the dramatic finale of Hensch's transgressive show.

In the article cited above, Ponce explores Millhauser's dramatizations of the audience's responses and perceptions also in other stories belonging to "theatrical pieces," which include, for example, "The Eisenheim the Illusionist" and "August Eschenburg." To supplement the critic's list and analyses, I would like to add a more recent story titled "The Slap," from the collection significantly titled *We Others* (2011), which seems to be closer to "The Knife Thrower" in the way it manipulates the point of view and breaks the boundaries between the performer and his (in this case unwilling) audience. In the story, a mysterious and unnamed "performer," who appears on one September evening at the local parking lot, terrorizes a deceptively idyllic commuter town in New England by slapping randomly chosen residents. Although the slapper and his reasons remain elusive throughout the narrative, his attacks haunt the victims and the whole community, gradually contaminating and destroying the pastoral atmosphere of the town and triggering both personal and collective soul-searching for the explanation behind the mysterious happenings. The repeated and ever bolder assaults of the "serial slapper," who, as the narrator admits, looks like any other man in town and smacks people even in broad daylight, encroaching also on the privacy of their homes, turn the entire neighborhood into a peculiar "theatrical continuum," in which everybody is onstage and nobody is safe from the "slap." The town-turned-spectacle is sieged with mutual distrust and draws people to reconsider the limits as well as myths of their "pastoral" idyll and small town morality:

> In one sense, it seemed to us, a slap is a form of withholding, of refusal; it presents itself as the deliberate absence of a more damaging blow.… Looked at another way, the slap doesn't merely withhold: the slap imparts. What it imparts is precisely the knowledge of greater power withheld. In that knowledge lies the genius of the slap, the deep humiliation it imposes. It invites the victim to accept a punishment that might have been worse— that will in fact be worse if the slap isn't accepted. The slap requires in the victim an unwavering submission, an utter abnegation. The victim bends in spirit before a lord. ("The Slap" 18)

The violent "mark" of the mysterious provocateur—that "sign of blood, without the blood"—(18) tears deeply at the fiber of the community. The lingering violence of 'the performance', which the narrator reads as "a sign of the greater pain not inflicted" (18), affects the townsfolk even when the mysterious "slaps began to recede" ("The Slap" 30):

> As the slaps began to recede, as even their echo in our minds was becoming fainter and fainter, we wondered whether we had emerged successfully from our ordeal. To call it an ordeal was of course something of an exaggeration. After all, we hadn't been murdered. We hadn't been raped, or beaten, or stabbed, or robbed. We had only been slapped. Even

> so, we had been invaded, had we not, we had felt threatened in our streets
> and homes, we had been violated in some definite though enigmatic way.
> ("The Slap" 30)

The "enigmatic," indefinite nature of the "field of performance" (Hurley 26) and the slap's unsettling "collective" effect become perfect metaphors of art's power to force its audiences out of their comfort zones and stimulate diverse emotional responses. Using the affective loop between the "performer" and his audience, Millhauser probes the latters' complacent attitudes, offering the reader a subtle web of observations concerning human nature and community which can function both as refuge and nightmare. The focalization and the plural narrative voice serves the writer to dramatically shape his audiences' involvement in the stories' grim climaxes, foregrounding also the ethical and moral consequences of participation.

Erin Hurley contends that, "via emotional labour, theatre intervenes in how we as a society come to understand ourselves, our values, and our social world" (10). Popular forms of entertainment, the critic continues, "confirm at the level of feeling the dominant moral ethos of the culture" (62). As has been shown, in the story "The Knife Thrower," as well other stories evoked in the analysis, Millhauser uses theatrical scripts and the immersive power of performance, along with the dynamics of emotional and conceptual blending characteristic of theatrical audiences, to rethink social rituals, intersubjectivities and the ethical questions of participation, communal responsibility and belonging. The mode of attention which the writer often chooses for his narratives, namely the plural consciousness, becomes a "black mirror" which conjures the intensity of the theatrical emotion, at the same time helping to expose the anxieties, forbidden desires, dubious moralities and hypocrisies of his protagonists and the communities to which they belong.

Works Cited

Alexander, Danielle, Pedro Ponce and Alicita Rodríguez. "Steven Millhauser." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 26.1 (2006): 7-76. Web. 19 Feb. 2016.

Carlson, Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003. Print.

Chénetier, Marc. *Steven Millhauser: La précision d'impossible*. Paris: Belin. 2003. Print.

——. An Interview with Steven Millhauser. *Transatlantica* 1 (2003). Web. 30 Nov. 2016.

Harvie Jen and Dan Rebellato. Series Editors' Preface. Erin Hurley. *Theatre and Feeling*. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. vii-viii. Print.

Hatfield, Elaine, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson. *Emotional Contagion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print.

Hurley, Erin. *Theatre and Feeling*. London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2010. Print.

Shaughnessy, Nicola. *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science: Body, Brain, and Being.* London, New Delhi, New York and Sidney: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. "Introduction. Interweaving Performance Cultures— Rethinking 'Intercultural Theatre': Toward an Experience and Theory of Performance Beyond Postcolonialism." *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism.* Ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Torsten Jost, and Saskya Iris Jain. New York: Routledge, 2014. 1-16. Print.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, Torsten Jost and Saskya Iris Jain, eds. *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism.* New York: Routledge, 2014. Print.

Fowler, Douglas. "Steven Millhauser, Miniaturist." *Critique*, 37.2 (1996): 139-148. Print.

Ingersoll, Earl G. *Understanding Steven Millhauser.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014. Print.

Lethem, Jonathan. "Steven Millhauser's Ghost Stories." *The New York Times* 2 Sep. 2011. Web. 11 Feb. 2018.

Maxey, Ruth. "The Rise of the 'We' Narrator in Modern American Fiction." *European Journal of American Studies*. 10. 2 (2015). Web. 4 Oct 2018.

Millhauser, Steven. *The Knife Thrower and Other Stories.* New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010. Print.

——. "The Knife Thrower." *We Others: New and Selected Stories.* New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2011. 281-292. Print.

——. "The Slap." *We Others: New and Selected Stories.* New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2011. 3-31. Print.

——. *We Others: New and Selected Stories.* New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2015. Print.

Plantinga, Carl. *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience.* Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2009. Print.

Ponce, Pedro. "'A game we no longer understood': Theatrical Audiences in the Fiction of Steven Millhauser." *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 26.1 (2006): 90-109. Print.

Roudeau, Cécile. "Steven Millhauser, une écriture sur le fil." *Steven Millhauser, une écriture sur le fil.* Ed. Anne Ulmo. Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion. 2004. 11-37. Print.

Saltzman, Arthur M. "In the Millhauser Archives." *Critique* 37.2 (1996): 149-160. Print.

Welton, Martin. *Feeling Theatre.* London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. Print.

Ewa Antoszek

The U.S.-Mexico Border as a Palimpsest
in Ana Teresa Fernández's Art

Abstract: The question of land has always been crucial to Latinos/as living in the U.S., due to the series of historical events that resulted in "[t]erritorial dispossession and dislocation" (Pérez 147) that have particularly influenced this ethnic group and relegated them both literally and metaphorically towards the margin—the border. Consequently, the border has played a significant role in the Latinx discourse for a long time. The complexity of spatial-social relations increased with subsequent waves of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American states. However, as Monika Kaup notes, being both "natives of the Southwest before the American conquest" and immigrants, Latinos/as in the U.S. constitute "a charter as well as an immigrant group" (Kaup 26). This double status of the group is reflected in Chicano/a literary and cultural productions through nation-based and immigrant paradigms (Kaup 26) that have been constructed in direct reference to the border, since "[b]eneath the surface of these models lie two different concepts of the border" (Kaup 10). Combined with the transformations in the discourse on space the concept of the border has undergone several re-definitions and the changing role of the border—from the demarcation line to more porous and permeable space has been reflected in numerous artistic productions by Latinx authors and artists. Those artistic productions illustrate the transformations of the space and address the aforementioned interplay between indigenous and immigrant paradigms often present in the discourse on the Mexican-American border. The purpose of this article is to analyze how the space of the border is (re-)visioned by Latina artist Ana Teresa Fernández, turning the border into a cultural palimpsest. It focuses mainly on Fernández's *Erasing the Border/Borrando La Frontera* (2013), together with the community project of the same title, and selected paintings from her series *Foreign Bodies* (2013) and *Pressing Matters* (2013) in order to examine the aforementioned redefinitions of the border and its multiple roles. Fernández's revisionist performances of the border both contribute to the ongoing debate on the still urgent and pressing problem of the U.S.-Mexico border and are also an apt reflection on the status quo of borders in general.

Keywords: Mexican-American border, La Frontera, borderlands, Ana Teresa Fernández, immigrant and indigenous paradigms, border crossings, Latinos/as, Burgin's pre-texts, Mieke Bal

The question of land or *tierra* has always been crucial to Latinos/as living in the U.S., due to the series of historical events that resulted in "[t]erritorial dispossession and dislocation" (Pérez 147) that have particularly influenced this ethnic group. Latinos/as in general and Mexican Americans specifically, have been described as de-spaced peoples whose deterritorialization has been reinforced through subsequent

historical events, including the sixteenth-century conquest, the annexation of Texas in 1836, or the Guadalupe-Hidalgo treaty, ending the Mexican-American war in 1848 and taking away a large portion of formerly Mexican land, together with people living there. The events of the mid-nineteenth century influenced the socio-political status of the group, their cultural productions, and identity, since due to those transformations their location moved both literally and metaphorically towards the margin—the border.[1] Consequently, as Laura Pérez observes, "methodical displacement from the lands inhabited by our kin through wars of conquest and relocation to non-ancestral 'reservations' has gone hand in hand with economic, social, political, and cultural disenfranchisement" (148). Moreover, it is also true about the "experience of those whose families have immigrated from Mexico in the last two generations" (Pérez 147) that it "repeats this sense of cultural displacement, sharpened and conditioned by this historic anti-Mexicanism, still rooted for many in the assumption of the inferiority of both the Indians and the Spanish from whom Mexicans originally descended" (Pérez 147). These conclusions, among others, indicate that the spatial construct of the border has played a significant role in the Latinx discourse for a long time.

    The complexity of spatial-social relations increased with subsequent waves of immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American states. The newcomers either joined the established Mexican-American/Latinx communities or started to occupy new locations, which led to a greater heterogeneity of the group and, as a result, the Latnix status in the U.S. became even more complex than before. However, as Monika Kaup notes, being both "natives of the Southwest before the American conquest" and immigrants, Latinos/as in the U.S. constitute "a charter as well as an immigrant group" (Kaup 26).[2]

    This double status of the group is reflected in Chicano/a literary and cultural productions through nation-based and immigrant paradigms (Kaup 26) that have been constructed in direct reference to the border, since "[b]eneath the surface of these models lie two different concepts of the border" (Kaup 10). In the case of the nation-based paradigm, the border is treated as "home territory, as homeland, as viewed by

---

1   The margin and the border belong, as Edward Casey and Mary Watkins argue, "to the broad family of things we call "edges"" (13), which "mark the place where thins lose their dense consistency and land relinquishes its spread-out character" (13), yet at the same time "edges are where energies of many kinds—personal and political, demographic, geographic and historical—collect and become concentrated" (13). Such a positioning of the border is also identified by Paul Ganster who attributes it to disparate interests of centers and margins—border regions. He maintains that "[n]ational institutions, indeed institutions in general, are often weak in border regions and border peoples are frequently economically and politically marginalized from the life of the nations of which they are citizens" (xxi) and hence they have often come up with strategies that allow them to combat this relegation to the margin.

2   See my discussion on the aforementioned concepts in *Out of the Margins: Identity Formation in Contemporary Chicana Wrtings*.

the original occupants of the borderlands" (Kaup 10). In the case of the immigrant paradigm, the border is regarded "as a line crossed in the northward migration from Mexico, as viewed by the new immigrants" (Kaup 10). Both "Chicano narrative" and "Chicano historiography" have presented "the border as filtered through these two paradigms, which derive from the patterns of *mexicano* history in the borderlands" (Kaup 10).

Owing to those two paradigms as well as the developments in the theory of space at the end of the twentieth century, the concept of the U.S.-Mexico border has also undergone significant transformations, from the definition of this space emphasizing its fixedness and stability to the concepts that underscore its permeability and in a sense fluidity. The former definitions of *La Frontera* were grounded in its historical and political functions and they resembled a generic definition of a border proposed by Edward Casey and Mary Watkins where "a border is a clearly and crisply delineated entity established by conventional agreements, such as treaties or laws... a border is primarily a product of human history and its vicissitudes" (14), "most often designed to be impervious" (15), which should be ideally guaranteed by its precise location (15). In their analysis of terminology applied to *La Frontera* Casey and Watkins maintain that this particular space also shows certain characteristics of a boundary, which they define as a concept that "too, can have cultural and historical aspects, but it is paradigmatically natural in status... rarely demarcated with exacting precision, varying in contour and extent depending on surrounding circumstances" (14) and "[m]ost important, it is porous" (15) and "lacks precise positioning" (15). According to Casey and Watkins, *La Frontera* combines elements of both concepts and, in order "to understand the situation at the U.S.-Mexico border" (21), they propose a set of concepts arranged in a specific order, namely "boundary, borderland, border, walls and fences, and borderline" (21) which allows for defining the border in a more precise way, at the same time acknowledging the transformations the concept has undergone, since according to this scheme, "the border... is closer to a borderline in terms of its putative precision but also integral to the very idea of a borderland" (21).[3] Such positioning of the border also illustrates Kaup's idea of the interplay of the indigenous and immigrant paradigms applied to define this space, as the border combines aspects of the demarcation line and homeland (i.e. Aztlán transformed into borderlands).

The mutability of the concept of the U.S.-Mexico border is also reflected

---

3   Casey and Watkins define the borderline as "a cartographic entity, a linear representation of a limit established by political negotiation" (20) and they argue that "neither aspect of *La Frontera* is to be confused with the *borderline* between the United States and Mexico" (20). Borderland in turn is defined by them as "the area that flanks a recognized international border, usually on both sides. It is an area, a region, in the form of a band or strip that cannot be measured in so many meters or miles. In its indeterminacy of the exact extent, a borderland resembles a boundary, but a borderland is bound, conceptually and concretely, to the border it surrounds" (21).

in its literary and artistic representations that include such disparate images as the aforementioned dividing line and a more inclusive space of the borderlands zone. Jesús Benito and Ana Manzanas examine the redefinitions of the concept of the border through the analysis of several terms that have been applied to describe the U.S.-Mexico border and which illustrate the transformations discussed above. They depart from the concept of the border as the demarcation line, and enumerate subsequent re-conceptualizations of the space, including Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands, Alfred Arteaga's "border zone," Manuel Aguirre, Roberta Quance, and Philip Sutton's "threshold," or Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact zones, to name just a few.[4] The trajectory of those changes supports the assumption about the liminal character of the border and regardless of the terms used, the successive concepts of the border imply both division and contiguity or, in some cases, permeability.

Moreover, the concept of the border is even more complex, due to the fact that it can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. As Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen observe, "the rich interdisciplinary body of research that has emerged since the 1990s conceives of borders as social constructions possessing both material and symbolic aspects" (9) where the material aspects, such as, for example, fences or walls, pertain to metaphorical borders crossed by Latinx on a daily basis. Casey and Watkins refer to this literal-metaphorical dichotomy of the interpretation of the border, maintaining that "the actual border and the material wall" (7) have "their multiple echoes in the divisions in our neighborhoods, schools and daily lives" (7). They argue that "[t]he wall that now marks the U.S.-Mexico border concretizes the metaphorical walls that have been born of racism, fear, and avarice in many towns and cities throughout the United States" (7) and "the border operates at psychological, interpersonal and intercommunity levels" (7). Emma Pérez, in the description of her course, "History 5351: Literature and Methodology of Borderlands" seems to confirm that conclusion, defining borderlands in two ways: 1) as "space, geography, territory, region, global, local"; and 2) as "psychic, imaginary, imposed demarcations, lines and boundaries" (in Engstrand 506). The emphasis, Pérez explains, "is upon racial and gender issues, new interpretations and questions dealing with distinctions between geographic spaces and imaginary psychic borderlands" (in Engstrand 506), which resonated also earlier in Analzdúa's concept of *La Frontera*. Claire Fox in turn suggests that "[t]here exists not a Border with capital B but unpredictable boundary encounters which show how the border repeats itself in different locations and times" (in Benito and Manzanas 4) and, as a consequence, "[a]s a phenomenological category, the border was something that people carried within themselves, in addition to being an external factor structuring their perceptions" (in Benito and Manzanas 63).

The changing role of the border—from the demarcation line to more porous

---

4   I have discussed the aforementioned concepts in my articles "La Línea vs. La Frontera–Representations of the Border and Border Crossings in Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains*" and "Contested Spaces/Striated Spaces: Representations of the Border in Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir*."

and permeable space has been reflected in numerous artistic productions by Latinx authors and artists who create images of the U.S.-Mexico border, presenting different roles of the border as well as its influence on border crossers and the environment. Those artistic productions illustrate the transformations of the space and address the aforementioned interplay between indigenous and immigrant paradigms often present in the discourse on the Mexican-American border. The purpose of this article is to analyze how the space of the border is (re-)visioned by a Latina artist Ana Teresa Fernández, turning the border into a cultural palimpsest. Due to the scope of the article, it focuses mainly on Fernández's *Erasing the Border/Borrando La Frontera* (2013), together with the community project of the same title, and selected paintings from her series *Foreign Bodies* (2013) and *Pressing Matters* (2013)[5] in order to examine the aforementioned redefinitions of the border and its multiple roles. Fernández's revisionist performances of the border both contribute to the ongoing debate on the still urgent and pressing problem of the U.S.-Mexico border and are also an apt reflection on the status quo of borders in general.

Ana Teresa Fernández was born in Mexico (Tampico) and raised and educated in the U.S. In her works she often presents different roles of the border as well as its influence on border crossers and the environment. *Erasing the Border/ Borrando la frontera* (2013)[6] is part of her first individual exhibition—*Foreign Bodies*—that was hosted at Gallery Wendi Norris in San Francisco in 2014 and which "explores how women navigate the geographic, social, and physiological boundaries between the United States and Mexico" (anateresafernandez.com). Consequently, "[d]ocumenting her performances and installations using photography and the painted image, Fernández's work reveals how women's bodies become surfaces imprinted with political and social upheavals" (anateresafernandez.com) and re-presents the contested space of the U.S.-Mexico border in a broader context.

Erasing the Border/Borrando La Frontera (2013) depicts a woman, standing next to a tall fence with her back to the audience. The fence is located on a beach and it crosses the dunes, the beach itself and enters the ocean. There is also a ladder propped against the fence, as the woman is painting it blue and she will need the ladder to paint the upper parts of the fence. At first when we look at the painting we see the fence that becomes prominent in its role of a marker of the border that divides two nation-states. It functions as this sharp, fixed demarcation line that separates both space and people on both sides of the border. Owing to the fence, the space is striated—both in literal and Deleuzian sense—numerous vertical lines cut the space and divide it into separate entities, closed nations. Evoking Benito and Manzanas' comparison of the idea of the closed nation predetermined by the closed border to the concept of the classical body as expressed by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*

---

5   The dates referred to have been provided by the artist on her website, anateresafernandez. com.

6   The painting should not be mistaken with a photographic performance documentation of the same title dated to 2012.

(7), where "[t]he classical body/nation is an image of completeness" (7), it can be stated that the border "can be seen as a sharp line of demarcation which guards and protects an entirely finished and complete political and geographical body" (8). Nonetheless, Benito and Manzanas also observe that based on the definition proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, the border is "also a part of the body/nation through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to the world" (8), which implies permeability of the border, or, in other words, means that it also functions "as an orifice in the body/nation" (8). In that sense their concept of the changing border resembles the way Casey and Watkins describe *La Frontera*—as having at the same time qualities of both a borderline and boundary as well as borderlands. Their conclusions are illustrated by Fernández's work as well: first of all, the border is marked by a fence (not a wall yet)—we can see through the fence to the other side of the border, though the movement of humans between the two sides will be constricted. The ladder propped against the fence acquires symbolic meaning in that context, as it may be simply read as a device necessary for painting upper parts of the fence, but its prominent position—in the center of the painting— suggests its more important role. Consequently, it may also symbolize the instrument that allows the transgression to the other side, i.e. the U.S. Moreover, from the distance it looks like a ladder to the skies/heaven, which given the positionality of the viewer—we are behind the woman painting the fence, looking across from Mexico to the U.S.—implies that the other side is the object of one's dreams. Such readings of the painting's layout are justified by Mieke Bal's analysis of "the cinematic in still pictures" (18) that she conducts in "Movement and the Still Image." In her analysis Bal proposes that what "cinematic images share with painting and photography is *framing*" ("Movement" 18) but the painting can avoid "limitations imposed by the lens" ("Movement" 18), as "an artist can freely choose the size and proportions of the canvas or panel" ("Movement" 18), which implies an artist is also free to select the way objects are distributed and located on the canvas, i.e. the central position of the ladder is supposed to draw the viewer's attention and calls for reinterpretation of its apparent functions.

Furthermore, we need to recognize the play of Victor Burgin's pre-texts in *Borrando la Frontera* (2013). Burgin uses the term pre-text on several occasions while analyzing the way the audiences interpret visual arts (in *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* and *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture*) and he defines pre-texts as elements that exist in popular preconscious which even if they do not get chosen, exist and "can be called to mind by the majority of individuals in a given society at a particular moment in history" (in Calvo 216), thus revealing both "manifest and latent contents of the image" (61), and which "will yield a different set of images along the paradigmatic chain" (217) as well as make the interpretation depend on one's cultural location (217).[7] In that sense Burgin's pre-

_____

7   See my discussion on pre-texts in Alma López's art in "Crossing the Borders of Tradition:

texts play the same role in perception of an image as memory in Mieke Bal's analysis. Bal claims that there is "the coexistence, in perception, of the act of perceiving in the present, and the role memory plays in that act" ("Movement" 17)—hence, the artwork is perceived by the viewer in the present but under the influence of the past. In her analysis Bal takes up on Bergson's concept of perception, which, as she claims, "is not a *construction*, as we have considered it in the post-realist era, but a *selection*.... an act *of* the body and *for* the body as it is positioned in the midst of things to select from" ("Movement" 25-26) and which "[w]hile occurring in the present... is bound to memory" ("Movement" 26). In fact, as Bal maintains, "[a] perception image that is not infused with memory images is impossible" ("Movement" 26) which Bal attributes to Bergson's idea how memory participates in perception, "which begins by being only memory, prolongs a *plurality* of moments into each other, *contracting* them into a single intuition" (Bergson in Bal, "Movement" 26) and which is later on taken up by Gilles Deleuze who analyzing Bergson's visions concludes that "Bergsonian duration is... defined less by succession than coexistence" (in Bal, "Movement" 26). Consequently, Burgin's pre-texts or Bergsonian duration allow for the analysis of the work of art as a cultural palimpsest with multiple layers located underneath the image and at the same time coming up to its surface.

In the case of *Borrando la Frontera* (2013) the pre-texts include the photos documenting Mexican Americans talking to their relatives through the fence in Friendship Park in San Diego/Tijuana that have often illustrated newspaper articles devoted to the questions of immigration. The photos depict people standing on both sides of the fence and talking to each other through the gaps in the fence. Very often families have met that way and those who have crossed to the other side could still keep in touch with those who have stayed in Mexico, not infrequently including their own offspring. All these photos show that some kind of contact or communication between the two sides is possible and therefore, it can be concluded that even this concept of the border as the dividing line allows transgression under certain circumstances. Therefore, in reality, the countries on both sides of the border should not be defined through the aforementioned image of the "classical body/nation" (7) but they resemble Bakhtin's "grotesque body/nation" (Benito and Manzanas 7). According to Benito and Manzanas who quote Mikhail Bakhtin's definition, "the grotesque body/nation is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (7). What is more, "[t]he grotesque body is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin qtd. in Benito and Manzanas 7), which implies progress rather than stability/integrity of the body/nation and, consequently defies fixedness of its border(s). Finally, as Benito and Manzanas conclude, "[w]hereas the classical body/nation is sealed from outer influences, the grotesque [body/nation] is permeable and stresses elements common to the entire cosmos" (8). Owing to

---

Alma López's *Our Lady* (1999) and *Our Lady of Controversy II* (2008)."

that, the border, as part of the body/nation turns into an outlet through which those influences are transferred and exchanged.

Casey and Watkins also emphasize the porosity of the border and they identify "many spontaneous transgressions of the wall at La Frontera" (18), which include "movements of the air, clouds, and weather over the wall; human voices that fly over the wall and can be heard on the other side; Internet communications between people in Tijuana and San Diego" (18). Those spontaneous transgressions are accompanied by intentional breaches, since the paradox of any limitation is that it calls for transgression, or as Casey and Watkins claim, quoting Foucault, "The limit and [the] transgression depend on each other... [;] a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (in Casey and Watkins 18). Therefore, as they conclude, "In the current context, the wall-as-limit intensifies the attraction of crossing over it: crossing becomes an achievement of its own" (18). The border becomes thus permeable and porous and it is transformed into a more liminal space which allows for some dialogue/contact/exchange. This idea and the unstable role of the fence are reinforced when we look at the results or effects of both *Borrando la frontera* (2013) and the community project of the same title—painting the fence the blue color means that it is not visible from the distance, which is particularly striking in the photographs documenting the project. Therefore, in the areas where the fence is already painted, the border becomes as if erased.

Such an attempt to eradicate symbolically the U.S.-Mexico border can be classified as the example of Paulo Freire's limit acts evoked by Casey and Watkins to analyze border-wall art. They define the limit act as "an act that both resists the imposition of destructive limits and creates anew in the face of them" (206). Casey and Watkins examine several examples of border-wall art and conclude that this art has the "power to undermine the wall's functions, to transmute the impending material surfaces into a gallery that nourishes critical consciousness, memorializes losses, and sparks prophetic imagination" (208). Moreover, they argue, "Border-wall art portrays marginalized points of view, critiques dominant messages, and not only posits alternate possibilities but creates them" (208). In the case of *Borrando la frontera* (2013) and *Borrando*, the project, the art has the power to "undo" the fence—the marker of the border—and in this way re-create the space on its both sides as one. Casey and Watkins also note a similar role of border-wall art and they argue that "Performative border art also defies the limit of the wall, rehearsing transgressions that allow imagination to transcend the wall's brute technologized and material limit" (208) and so does *Borrando la Frontera*.

What is also interesting is the person who paints the fence. In the project we will have the whole community involved in this action. Here the painter is the aforementioned young woman, dressed in a black dress and wearing high heels—the attire seemingly not very suitable for the occasion. In the series *Foreign Bodies* the artist includes *Entre #1* through *Entre #4 (performance documentation at San Diego/Tijuana*

border) (2013)—paintings which constitute a sequence of close-ups that present a detailed picture of a woman, documenting the performance on the U.S.-Mexico border. The woman defies traditional or stereotypical, representations of Mexican women and the artist herself explains such a representation of the person in charge:

> Through performance-based paintings, I explore territories that encompass these different types of boundaries and stereotypes: the physical, the emotional, and the psychological.
>
> My work investigates how women identify their strengths and sensuality in performing labor in which there is no visible economic or social value, and which is frequently considered 'dirty.' I also subvert the typical overtly folkloric representations of Mexican women in paintings by changing my protagonist's uniform to the quintessential little black dress. Wearing this symbol of American prosperity and femininity, the protagonist tangos through this intangible dilemma with her performances at the San Diego/Tijuana Border—a place I myself had to cross to study and live in the US. (anateresafernandez.com)

Through that Fernández shows how the border and border crossings function on different levels. She illustrates the existence of the "repeating border" (Benito and Manzanas 4)—a metaphorical border, mentioned above or what Davis calls a "third border" (70). He explains this idea, arguing that borders "tend to follow... Latinos wherever they live and regardless of how long they have been in the United States" (70-71). As a result, Davis maintains, "the interface between affluent Anglo majorities and growing blue-collar Latino populations is regulated by what can only be typed a 'third border'... [which] polices daily intercourse between two citizen communities" (71). Owing to that, the border will always play an important role in the migrant's life, either in its material or symbolic aspect. With such a representation of a potential border crosser Fernández implies that women have to cross those multiple borders on a daily basis.

The shift in the focus—from the fence as the marker of the border in *Borrando la Frontera* (2013) to the multiple border crosser—a woman in a black dress—is also emphasized by framing and spatial organization of the series, as the close-ups in *Entres* focus primarily on fragments of her figure. In *Entre #1* it is her head with a face put between the bars of the fence and turned towards the other side of the border. However, instead of painting the fence, as she does in *Borrando la Frontera* (2013) she holds tightly to the fence, as if looking longingly towards what there is on the other side. Such a positioning of the woman may also suggest that she is imprisoned behind those bars and as a prisoner of the border, she cannot cross it. In *Entre #2* spatial organization is much more balanced, as the image is divided between the fence and the woman's body—both seem to play an equally important role in the image. *Entre #3* in turn depicts both the fence and part of the dress but the blue fence against the blue skies almost disappears and this impression is reinforced by a contrast of the

painted fence with a black dress. *Entre #4* shifts the frame and focus—the woman is standing on the left side of the picture (when in previous sequences she was on the right side) and what draws the viewer's attention immediately is her black stiletto shoes, looking completely out of place on a sandy beach. Once again in *Entre #1-4* Fernández defies a stereotypical portrayal of Latinas by using the aforementioned symbolic motif of "the quintessential little black dress" (anateresafernandez.com). However, on the basis of the scene in *Entre #4* it can be also concluded that the potential "American prosperity" (anateresafernandez.com) may not be attainable fully for the woman, as the border casts a shadow on her efforts, just like the fence in *Entre #4* casts a shadow on the sand, as if cutting this space with black lines. The striated space of the borderland symbolizes the divisions the border imposes and it may be also a reference to those borders that follow Latinas in their everyday lives in the U.S. and multiple metaphorical borders they have to cross daily.

Finally *Borrando la frontera (2013)* touches upon one more issue, crucial in the discussions about the U.S.-Mexico border, namely the environment—in the paining Fernández presents clean waters and clean sand at the background of the image of the fence and the woman. Here the artists plays with her other works from the series *Pressing Matters* (2013) where she refers to the environmental issues and the ecological disaster and devastation of the environment in the borderlands, due to the development of industry (*maquiladoras*) and addresses the question of female roles and domestic chores. The title itself—pun intended—refers to those two issues mentioned above and hence the series includes images of the lady in a black dress ironing (in different, often sexualized positions on the ironing board) and the same lady attempting at cleaning the polluted area of the U.S.- Mexico border. Hence the title, *Pressing Matters* may be read as an ironic call for the recognition of domestic chores usually performed by women, i.e. pressing a.k.a. ironing matters, but at the same time it may refer to those environmental issues and the influence of the border and its marker—the fence/wall on the environment on both sides of the border that have been disregarded for a long time, which has led to the destruction of the environment on both sides of the border, regardless of the political line dividing this space into two. Hence the title of the series can be also interpreted as pressing, i.e. urgent, serious matters. The artist herself describes the series in the following way:

> In these performances, I portrayed this multiplication of self and the Sisyphean task of cleaning the environment to accentuate the idea of disposable labor resources. Moreover, the black dress is transformed into a funerary symbol of luto, the Mexican tradition of wearing black for a year after a death.
>
> In addition to highlighting ongoing socio-political conflicts, the works also underscore the intersection of everyday tasks and fantasy from both sides of the political/gender divide, illuminating the psychological walls that confine and divide genders in a domestic space. (anateresafernandez.com)

Consequently, the two untitled paintings that depict the U.S.-Mexico border portray the woman in a black dress who is either preoccupied with cleaning the muddy-looking waters of the ocean with a mop, or, in the second painting, sweeping the sandy beach next to the fence. The latter painting is particularly interesting, due to the technique that Fernández deploys there. The artist puts in one painting the sequence of images of the same woman which, when watched from right to left constitute subsequent stages of the cleaning process. At the utmost right, the woman, standing with her back to the audience and facing the fence begins the sweeping. Then her body shifts to the left and at the same time the brush/broom goes up, as it does in the process of sweeping out some trash, leaving some trace of sand in the air. In the very last part of the sequence, the woman is kneeling and putting the sand into a dustpan. The succession of those images placed in one painting reinforces the notion of movement the viewer has when watching the painting and gives the work cinematic quality. In fact those images look more like snapshots or consecutive scenes from a film than a painting, which reinforces performativity of the image and lends the work of art to more interpretations. In this way the two untitled paintings from Pressing Matters resemble *Borrando la Frontera* (2013) and *Entres*. In all of them "movement is implied, halted, and the work suggests, will go on after we watch this scene. This foregrounds another aspect of visual art, cinema and paining alike: the encounter it stages and embodies" (Bal, "Movement" 19). At the same time it also "precludes a naïve view of the painting as a transparent, realistic representation" (Bal, "Movement" 19) and makes it possible for reinterpretation—it is not only the fence on the U.S.-Mexico border that is important but other walls have significance for Latinx as well.

To refer just briefly to the aforementioned community project *Borrando la frontera*—erasing the border—it took place in Nogales, Mexico in 2015. It involved painting the fence on the U.S.-Mexico border and it was also documented by photos. Fernández herself talks about this project and explains the reasons for performing this limit act:

> 'If a color cannot cure, can it at least incite hope?' writer Maggie Nelson asks in Bluets, a series of prose poems about the color blue. For residents of the border town of Nogales, Mexico, blue has become a promising signal of open skies and porous borders. On October 13, artist Ana Teresa Fernández led a group of volunteers equipped with paint rollers and brushes to 'erase' the border fence dividing the US and Mexico.... For those participating in and witnessing 'Erasing the Border,' the blue-painted fence represents not just a new view, but a way of reflecting on the experience of the border and connecting with others whose lives are impacted by the fence. (anateresafernandez.com)

In this way the artist alludes to what Casey and Watkins argue for in their analysis of the U.S.-Mexico border. They conclude that "[u]litmately once it has

outlived its political, economic, or symbolic usefulness, every border is destined to become a boundary, returning to an abiding state of nature" (26) and they claim that it "will be the fate of La Frontera—even if, from today's perspective such an outcome seems a long way off" (26). Whether this will be the actual outcome or not, it is hard to say, especially in the light of other border historians' opinions who claim that "a borderless world is not an imminent possibility" (Diener and Hagen 4). Nevertheless, in the meantime, as Casey and Watkins notwithstanding admit, "much suffering is occurring at and in the immediate vicinity of the wall" (26) and those who transgress the space of the border are haunted by this experience in multiple ways. Mieke Bal in *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* claims that

> an exposition makes something public, and that event of showing involves articulating in the public domain the most deeply held views and beliefs of a subject. This view extends the meaning of 'to expose' from the specific, literalized definition of it in, for example, the context of museum exhibitions to a broader, partly metaphorical use of the idea of 'museum' as a mise-en-abyme of culture's present, a present that carries the past within itself. (5)

Ana Teresa Fernández's attempt(s) to erase the border illustrate Bal's statement, since similar endeavors were made already in the earliest reconceptualizations of the border—for example, in Herbert Eugene Bolton's concept of the Spanish Borderlands (1902), Simón Bolívar's Pan-Americanism or Martí's idea of "Our America." However, just as neither Pan-Americanism nor Pan-Latin Americanism were fully satisfying and capable of erasing the border, since they ignored, among others, the complex and diverse histories of people living in the region, Fernández's project to undermine those multiple borders Latinx have to cross every day will not eradicate completely those physical and symbolic fences, either. Such a scenario seems particularly unlikely especially taking into account current political situation after the elections in the U.S. as well as the ongoing debate on migrants taking place in Europe.

At the same time the paintings and the project examined in this article constitute a specific (re)presentation of the U.S.-Mexico border, illustrating the interplay between the aforementioned indigenous and immigrant paradigms. In all of them the artist refers to the fence as the tangible marker of the border; they also present a potential border crosser. In this way Fernández suggests the interpretation of the border as the line to be crossed/transgressed—the process intrinsic to immigration. On the other hand, the idea of erasing the border that underlies both *Borrando*, the painting, and *Borrando*, the project, and uniting the space on both sides of the border into one may be interpreted as an allusion to the history of the region before political divisions striated this territory.

Consequently, Fernández's works show the potential limit acts have to undermine the existing status quo and the changing images of the border indicate in

turn that "[a]s a space of confrontation, appropriation and translation, the site of the border defies all attempts at cultural stasis" (Benito and Manzanas 10). On the one hand, it is the boundary rather than the borderline, which allows for exchange and dialogue but on the other hand, it is still this dividing line with the fence/wall as its marker—"an imposition which keeps peoples detained and unable to communicate" (Benito and Manzanas 12) and the border crossing itself becomes the "process of recycling through which old worlds turn into new worlds" (Benito and Manzanas 12), repeating the well-known battle over power. The artist's productions are an attempt to draw the attention of larger audiences to the problem of the U.S.-Mexico border and borders in general. At the same time they seem to confirm Foucault's conclusion that "[s]pace is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (in Soja 149)—in this particular case it is the space of the U.S.-Mexico border that enters into this discussion and Fernández's works provide an important voice in the debate about the contested space of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Works Cited

Antoszek, Ewa. Contested Spaces/Striated Spaces: Representations of the Border in Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir." Roczniki Humanistyczne: Anglica* LXIV.11 (2016): 135-146. Print.

——. "La Línea vs. La Frontera—Representations of the Border and Border Crossings in Grande's *Across a Hundred Mountains." A View from Elsewhere.* Ed. Marcel Arbeit and Roman Trušník. Palacký University Olomouc, 2014. 195-214. Print.

——. *Out of the Margins: Identity Formation in Contemporary Chicana Writings.* Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang 2012. Print.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World.* Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984. Print.

Bal, Mieke. "Movement and the Still Image." *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 4 (2016). Universidad Nacional de Educación Distancia. 13-41. Print.

——. *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. Print.

Benito Jesús and Ana M. Manzanas. "Border(lands) and Border Writing: Introductory Essay." *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands.* Ed. Ana M. Manzanas and Jesús Benito. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2002. Print.

Burgin, Victor. *In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996. Print.

——. *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity.* Hampshire: Macmillan, 1986. Print.

Calvo, Luz. "Art Comes for the Archbishop: The Semiotics of Contemporary Chicana Feminism and the Work of Alma Lopez." *Meridians: Feminism, Race,*

Transnationalism 5.1 (2004): 201-224. Print.

Casey, Edward S., and Mary Watkins. *Up Against the Wall: Re-imagining the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014. Print.

Davis, Mike. *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City*. New York: Verso, 2008. Print.

Diener, Alexander C. and Joshua Hagen. *Borderlines and Borderlands: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-State*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. Print.

Engstrand, Iris H.W. "In Virtual Search of the Spanish Borderlands." *The Historian* 66.3 (2004): 501-508. Print.

Fernández, Ana T. *anateresafernandez.com*. Accessed 20 Jan. 2018.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. London: Harvester Publishing, 1980. Print.

Fox, Claire F. "Portable Border: Site-Specificity, Art, and the US-Mexico Frontier." *Social Text* 41 (Winter 1994): 61-82. Print.

Ganster, Paul. *The U.S.-Mexican Border Today: Conflict and Cooperation in Historical Perspective*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Print.

Kaup, Monika. *Rewriting North American Borders in Chicano and Chicana Narrative*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001. Print.

Pérez, Laura E. *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007. Print

Soja, Edward. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996. Print.

Paweł Marcinkiewicz

The Color of Avant-Garde:
Kenneth Goldsmith's "The Body of Michael Brown"

Abstract. In the following paper, I put forth a claim that literary works created according to the rules of conceptualism, seemingly devoid of expression, often reveal that values are inseparable from any textual operations. This is visible in Kenneth Goldsmith's recent project, "The Body of Michael Brown," which follows the format of Goldsmith's previous book—*Seven American Deaths and Disasters*—a transcription of news reports of American national disasters, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the attacks of 9/11. The text rewrites the autopsy report issued by the St. Louis County Coroner's Office on the shooting of Michael Brown, an African-American teenager shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The problem with the new conceptual art practice is that it disregards the ethical dimension of creation. For Goldsmith, ethical issues in art are limited to the question of "faithful" copying/rewriting, regardless of the fact that an appropriated text always reflects editorial manipulation and politics behind it. Goldsmith thinks of himself as a daring disciple of Duchamp, but he fails to understand that his text propagates racist violence, performing anew the autopsy's latent, institutional racism. In terms of methodology, I rely in my analyses on Marjorie Perloff's understanding of the concept of avant-garde and refer to the theories about literature and ethics emerging from recent writings by Cathy Park Hong and Jacques Rancière.

Keywords: Kenneth Goldsmith, conceptual literature, avant-garde, racism, the question of ethics in literature

Kenneth Goldsmith is one of rare contemporary American writers whose works—as Marjorie Perloff has it—"hit a real nerve," dividing his audience into hostile critics and most devoted fans (*Poetics in a New Key* 39). For his critics, he is frustrating because the inwardness of the lyrical "I" gets erased from his poems. His favorite technique is appropriation, which he used when he transcribed the entire edition of *The New York Times* of September 1, 2000, and published it as an 800-page book *Day*. Additionally, he often resorts to various elaborate constraints, as when he recorded chronologically all words spoken by him during one week in 2000, creating *Soliloquy*. For his fans, Goldsmith is more accessible than the great modernists, such as Pound or Eliot. Moreover, he is a writer who—quite contrary to the title of his collection of essays *Uncreative Writing*—gives the reader a feeling that originality of utterance is as easy as in the first decades of the twentieth century.

   The notion of "rewriting" or "copying" is crucial not only for Goldsmith, but for all writers associated with the so called "conceptual literature." The label was

coined by Goldsmith and his friend, poet and critic, Craig Dworkin. Both authors edited an influential anthology of "conceptual writing" *Against Expression*, which features 111 authors—American, British, Danish, French, German, Italian, Mexican and Norwegian—from the last three centuries. In the volume's introduction, whose title sounds like an activist's manifesto—"Why Conceptual Writing? Why Now"— Goldsmith claims that "[f]aced with an unprecedented amount of available digital text, writing needs to redefine itself to adapt to the new environment of textual abundance" (xvii). Chronologically speaking, the earliest writer in the anthology is Denis Diderot, whose *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* [*Jacques the Fatalist and His Master*] consists of hundreds of digressions, interruptions, and metatextual diversions, and it openly copies the second paragraph from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. One of the most recent contributors is Norwegian experimenter Paal Bjelke Andersen, whose "The Grefsen Address" is based on nationally televised speeches by the presidents or prime ministers of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, and Finland). From the raw text of those speeches, Andersen retains certain elements, such as all sentences mentioning the Nordic community, every sentence containing the word *language* (e.g., *språk* in Norwegian), all the names of places, and all sentences with the word *border* (e.g., *grense* in Norwegian).

As the above examples demonstrate, it seems that rewritten or copied texts do not necessarily contradict the traditionally understood notion of the author, perceived as an expression of *inventio*. "Unoriginal genius"—Marjorie Perloff's brief definition of conceptualism and the title of her collection of essays devoted to different conceptual artists—is not less creative, but its creativity operates on a different level: it is not the text that matters, but the way the text is processed, since copying itself is a performance, involving elements of transformation. Obviously, Goldsmith and Dworkin were inspired largely by visual arts, where—in the course of the twentieth century—artistic revolutions tended to occur a decade or two earlier than in literature. American painter Sol LeWitt, whose wall drawings augured conceptualism in the 1960s, pointed out that in creating his works he completed all of the planning and decision-making beforehand, so the process of execution was a perfunctory affair, because the idea itself became a "machine that made the art" (qtd. in Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing* loc. 160). As Goldsmith elucidates, in the realm of language-generating formal constraints, the writer resembles a "programmer" who conceptualizes, constructs, executes, and maintains a "writing machine" (*Uncreative Writing* loc. 104).

The environment of the broadband Internet, where huge text files can be copied and pasted within microseconds, is a natural habitat for conceptual techniques, aiming at multiplication of linguistic material. Difficulty is not understood as a modernist opacity of the text, but as quantity. Yet Goldsmith's and Dworkin's anthology demonstrates that contemporary American conceptual literature is deeply rooted in the tradition of European avant-gardes from the first decades of the twentieth century, especially in what Marjorie Perloff calls the "futurist moment."

The Futurists and the Dadaists explored possibilities that the use of the typewriter offered to the literary—and visual—composition. According to Perloff, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Guillaume Apollinaire, as well as Francis Picabia and Kurt Schwitters, made use of cut-ups and fold-ins whose format was drawn "from the world of advertising posters and newspapers, which was soon to find its way into the literature of the period" (*The Futurist Moment* 92). Postmodern experimenters, such as Brion Gysin and William S. Burroughs, emulated the Futurists, but their possibilities were expanded by the new medium of the Xerox machine. Goldsmith and Dworkin view composition in a similar way, and they use PCs as their tools, creating meanings by repurposing and recontextualizing preexisting texts.

Interestingly, it seems that Goldsmith and Dworkin—but also Perloff who championed them as direct continuators of European experimenters from the first decades of the twentieth century—do not fully recognize the significance of the American modernist tradition in the formation of contemporary conceptual genres. As Eliot Weinberger observes, in the USA, the tradition of appropriated literature started in 1925 when William Carlos Williams published his collection of short narratives, exploring American history, *In the American Grain* (xii). Another important writer was John Dos Passos, the author of *Manhattan Transfer*, who collected and polished raw linguistic material of various origin, from spoken language, through popular literature, to newspapers. Both Williams and Dos Passos may have inspired Charles Reznikoff, one of the greatest American poets of the mid-twentieth century, who was seriously preoccupied with copying and remodeling of preexisting texts, particularly in his two monumental poems, *Testimony* and *Holocaust*.

Reznikoff's *Testimony* began as a book of prose in the 1930s and, initially, it was based on *Corpus Juris* and court transcripts, describing cases of criminality and negligence. *Holocaust* had a similar design, recycling the transcript of the Nuremberg Trials and producing even a more upsetting narrative. The poet admits in an interview that sometimes he had to go through a volume of a thousand pages in order to "find just one case from which to take the facts and rearrange them so as to be interesting" (qtd. in Weinberger xiii). Reznikoff seems to have appreciated the factual aspects of the courtroom testimonies: "what matter[ed] was the facts of the case, what the witness saw and heard, not the witness' feelings about, or interpretations of those facts" (qtd. in Weinberger xiii). This is an expression of his Objectivist ideal of poetry, which "presents the thing in order to convey the feeling" (Weinberger xiii). However, in *Testimony* and *Holocaust*, not only did Reznikoff carefully select and arrange the facts, but he extensively worked on the language of his texts, creating a cleverly hidden network of internal rhymes and assonances.

This is exactly what makes Reznikoff radically different from the most recent wave of conceptual writers. The author of *Testimony* was not interested in the local speech he found in the courtroom transcripts, but only in the dry facts that he artistically developed in his own way. Finally, the testimonies of nameless people

reveal a transcendental undertone and become the Jewish narrative of suffering without redemption—a contemporary version of the *Book of Job*. As far as formal aspects of the narratives are concerned, the original manuscripts of Reznikoff's works are covered with revisions, which proves that he still wrote his texts, that is creatively reconfigured their shape and content, following the aesthetic precepts of his favorite lyrics from the Greek Anthology or classical China (Weinberger xiv). The most recent conceptualists, on the other hand, do not bother with the literary quality of the works they produce. Rather, they aim at a direct presentation of language, in which the self-regard of the poet's ego is turned back onto the self-reflective language of the poem itself. As Craig Dworkin has it, "the test of poetry [is] no longer whether it could have been done better (the question of the workshop), but whether it could conceivably have been done otherwise" (qtd. in Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius* 17).

A good example of this approach is Goldsmith's *The Weather*, which collects weather forecasts from the New York-based news radio station 1010 WINS, broadcasted between 2002 and 2003, and orders them from winter to fall:

1. *Winter*

A couple of breaks of sunshine over the next couple of hours, what little sunshine there is left. Remember, this is the shortest day of the year. Looks like the clear skies hold off till later on tonight. It will be brisk and cold, low temperatures will range from twenty-nine in some suburbs to thirty-eight in midtown. Not a bad shopping day tomorrow, sunshine to start, then increasing clouds, still breezy, with a high near fifty. Couple of showers around tomorrow night, er, tomorrow evening, into early tomorrow night, otherwise partly cloudy later on, low thirty. For Monday, windy and colder with sunshine, a few clouds, high forty-two. And then for, er, Christmas Eve, mostly sunny, but with a chilly wind, high near forty degrees. For Christmas itself, cloudy with a chance for rain or snow, high thirty-six. Forty-three degrees right now and cloudy, relative humidity is fifty-five percent in midtown. Repeating the current temperature forty-three going down to thirty-eight in midtown. (par. 1)

Goldsmith's manipulation lies in the fact that weather forecasts never occur in large numbers.. The idea that they could be stitched together in a narrative is exactly Goldsmith's writing machine—a very simple and effective one—transforming what originally served as a one-time informative statement into a series of vignettes with allegorical undertone. Indeed, all of the planning and decisions were made by the writer beforehand, and the process of execution—collecting the forecasts, transcribing, and organizing them in the right order—consisted of merely following the initially designed procedure. Thus, according to Perloff, *The Weather* is an example of what Antoine Compagnon calls *récriture*: the text represents two operations, the first of removal, which is often a "re"-gesture, such as reblogging or retweeting; the second of graft (*Unoriginal Genius* 3-4). Differently than in modern and postmodern

paradigms, the grafted text does not take its motive from Adorno's concept of *resistance* to culture industries—which was the main goal of Charles Reznikoff's sophisticated poetic technique—but it gives up the author's individualistic and expressionistic cast altogether. Effectively, an opposite model appears—a model of dialogue with texts in different genres and media—which is not based on "writing against" but on "writing through."

However, the works written in conceptual poetics, seemingly devoiced and devoid of expression, occasionally reveal that values are inseparable from any textual operations. On the other hand, the concept of avant-garde itself may imply an ethical bias, invisible for most audiences, since avant-garde art has always privileged educated, middle class artists and receivers, for whom KULTUR (in Perloff's original spelling) is an occupation and vocation, and who take advantage of their material and social status. All those matters are visible in Goldsmith's recent project, "The Body of Michael Brown" written in 2014, which follows the format of Goldsmith's previous book, *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* from 2013, a transcription of news reports of American national disasters, such as the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the attacks of 9/11. The text rewrites the autopsy report issued by the St. Louis County Coroner's Office of Michael Brown, an African-American teenager who was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, touching off months of local protests that spread to many cities nationwide. These protests did not stop police violence flooding American cities, and similar incidents occurred hundreds of times in 2014 and 2015.[1]

As for Michael Brown's death, even after a grand jury hearing, its details remain unclear. 18-year-old Brown had either battered a police officer, or was inoffensively walking down the street, accompanied by a friend. Most witnesses claim he was unarmed, with his hands in the air, when the on-duty officer shot him more than eight times. Goldsmith's initial impulse was to pay a tribute to Michael Brown and sympathize with his loved ones. Appropriating a text produced by a government officer can be perceived as an act of civil disobedience or an attempt to call to order corrupted authority. Yet under the layer of public duties that Goldsmith's poem tries to perform and the literary traditions it evokes, it is a text, in its most basic sense, written by a white man about black man's dead body—the body that was mutilated beyond recognition by the white police officer, Darren Wilson, and then stripped bare and humiliated before the investing gaze of the white coroner, Wendell Payne.

Interestingly, "The Body of Michael Brown" was never published, either online, or as a paper document. Kenneth Goldsmith read the poem at the "Interrupt

---

1   According to Sam Sinyangwe, researcher and activist, who started the *Mapping Police Violence* project, in 2014, 1,149 people of all ethnic groups were killed by the police in the USA, more than a hundred of them unarmed; in 2015, statistics were almost identical: 102 unarmed black people were killed by the police. Moreover, only 10 cases resulted in officers' being charged with a crime, and two of these deaths resulted in convictions of officers involved.

3," a conference on digital arts at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, on March 13, 2015. Goldsmith's performance was available online for several days and then was removed from the university's website at the poet's request, which was announced on his Facebook page: "I'm requesting that Brown University not make public the recording of my performance of 'The Body of Michael Brown.' There's been too much pain for many people around this and I don't wish to cause any more. My speaker's fee from the Interrupt 3 event will be donated to the family of Michael Brown" (Rettberg). However, it seems that the poet made his decision too late, because he had already become the target of attacks from the media as well as black activists, and he started to receive death threats. One of them was publicized online: "sextus gillig: i want 2 organize large benefit reading… 10000 poets strong for the death of kenneth golsmith we wld take donations of weapons not $" (Rettberg).

In a period of few weeks, Goldsmith's name became notorious in the American literary world for his unpublished poem that he had read only once—the poem that everybody talked about although it was no longer available for the audience. Preparing this paper in July 2016, I could not find "The Body of Michael Brown" online, so I emailed Kenneth Goldsmith, who works as a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, asking him to send me the text for the purpose of academic analysis. This is the poet's reply: "Hi Pawel, Thanks for your email. Sadly, I cannot release the piece as I have been under death threats and danger since its presentation. It never was available online, nor has it ever been made public in any form. With apologies, Kenneth (*pers. comm.*)." Here, the poet slightly alters the past, since—as we already know—his poem was available online for some time, long enough to leave a trace in a number of publications, which discuss and quote it.

Rewriting Michael Brown's autopsy report, Goldsmith noticeably modifies the original text, and he does so against his own precepts, which he expressed in his collection of essays *Uncreative Writing*: "Once formal decisions are made, there are ethical issues to consider. If I truly 'appropriate' this work, then I must faithfully copy/write every word of [it]. No matter how tempted I might be to alter the words of disagreeable politician or film critic, I cannot do so without undermining the strict 'wholes' that appropriation trucks in" (loc. 2129). "The Body of Michael Brown" alters the text of coroner's autopsy report for poetic effect, replacing obscure medical terms with plain vocabulary, easily understandable for the reader. Moreover, the usage of short clauses exhibits a surprising formal elegance of the text. All in all, this strategy considerably increases the emotional load of Goldsmith's text:

'The deceased hands were bagged with paper bags to save any trace evidence.'

'The weapon discharged during the struggle.'

'The deceased mother was on the scene.'

'The deceased was properly conveyed to this facility for examination by Dr. Norfleet.'

'The deceased was cool to the touch.'

'Rigor mortis was slightly felt in his extremities."

….

'The hands are covered with brown paper bags' (qtd. after Morris 109-110).

These brief statements are designed to create a dramatic effect: the brief appearance of the "deceased mother" and the mentioning of the fact that his corpse was "cool to the touch" provoke the reader to visualize the scene in the mode of romantic tradition of Goya's and Delacroix's paintings. The original autopsy report, which was written by medical investigator Wendell Payne, employs a first-person perspective, and it contains many longer and rather clumsy statements. The text, which initially leaked to the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, is available online:

> At 1330 hours I was contacted by Sergeant STEVENER DSN-2968, of the St. Louis County Police Department as he requested that I respond to 2949 Canfield for the Officer Involved shooting of Mr. MICHAEL BROWN, black male age of 18 years. The deceased mother was on the scene. The deceased was properly conveyed to this facility for examination by Dr. NORFLEET.
> The deceased was properly conveyed in a white body bag which was secured with U-line lock # 0867377.
> I arrived on the scene approximately 1430 hours which was located in the Canfield Apartments. There I was met by numerous officers of the St. Louis Police Department and they directed my attention to the deceased who was located in the middle of the roadway with his head pointed west and his feet east. The deceased had been covered with several white sheets.
> The deceased was lying in the prone position. His right arm was slightly extended away from his side. His left arm was next to his side his lower arm was beneath his abdomen and his hand was near the waist band of his shorts. He was clothed in a pair of yellow socks, tan shorts blue underwear and a gray t-shirt. The deceased shoes (flip flops) were west of the deceased lying in the roadway. A red baseball cap was near the police vehicle.
> The deceased was cool to the touch. Rigor mortis was slightly felt in his extremities.
> The deceased body sustained multiple gunshot wounds: three (3) wound WOUNDS? to his head, one wound was to the top of his head, right eye and right central forehead area. There were two (2) wounds to

his chest, one wound to his upper right chest near his neck and the other
was just right of his breast. Three (3) wounds to his right arm, one wound
in his upper right arm, middle of the arm and one to his forearm. One (1)
wound to the inside of his right hand near his thumb and palm.

       The decease had abrasions to the right side of his face and on the
back of his left hand.

       The deceased hands were bagged with paper bags to save any
trace evidence. ("Mike Brown Complete Autopsy Report")

In comparison with the original autopsy report, Goldsmith's text gets rid of all traces
of agency, using passive sentence constructions. According to Daniel Morris, this
technique diverts the reader's attention from the tremendous harm done to Michael
Brown by the government officials in the last moments of his life (Morris 109). The
next important change is that Goldsmith's description of Michael Brown's hands
forms a separate paragraph ("The deceased hands were bagged with paper bags to
save any trace evidence"). Interestingly, the image of the deceased hands in brown
paper bags recurs for the second time in the present tense ("The hands are covered
with brown paper bags"). As Morris points out, the hands are important, because
they can serve as evidence confirming—or denying—Darren Wilson's narrative that
a fight took place between him and Michael Brown, who tried to pull the officer's
gun from the holster (Morris 110). Additionally, the repetition produces an uncanny
atmosphere typical of the B-class horror movies and—together with the omission
of the appellation "deceased"—gives the reader an impression that Brown's hands
are chopped off from his corpse. This corresponds to Darren Wilson's grand jury
testimony, describing Brown as a "daemon" and "Hulk Hogan," whom Wilson needed
to put down with eight bullets (Sanburn).[2]

       Finally, Brown's hands emerging from his grave serve as a literary trope, first
bringing to mind John Keats's brief poem "The Living Hand," the last piece written
by the great romantic before his death:

> This living hand, now warm and capable
> Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
> And in the icy silence of the tomb,
> So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
> That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood
> So in my veins red life might stream again,
> And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—
> I hold it towards you. (258)

---

2   Wilson perceived Brown as an embodiment of evil: "He was just staring at me, almost
like to intimidate me or to overpower me…. When I grabbed him, the only way I can
describe it is I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan…. he looked up at me
and had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a
demon, that's how angry he looked" (Sanburn).

Like the hand in Keats's love poem, Brown's hands, once "warm and capable" and now cold and motionless, symbolize transitoriness of human life. On top of that, they are a promise of a future life, and they suggest a reunion of the speaker and the poem's addressee. The main difference between Keats's and Goldsmith's perspectives is that—if hands in general, like the Shakespearian "dyer's hand"—are the metonymy of a human being, then Brown's hands "bagged in paper bags" hide a mystery connected with his life and—first and foremost—his death.

However, the most significant difference between the autopsy and "The Body of Michael Brown" occurs at the end of Goldsmith's poem. The report ends with a comment about the histology examination: "Comment: the histology examination will be issued as a supplemental report" ("Mike Brown Complete Autopsy Report"). However, Goldsmith ends his text with a description of the deceased genitalia, which appears earlier in the original autopsy: "There is foreskin present near the head of the penis. The remaining male genitalia system is unremarkable" (qtd. after Morris 111). Obviously, the shocking sexists and racist overtone of this line comes from the double meaning of the adjective "unremarkable," which is used in the medical jargon, meaning "unchanged," and its colloquial sense is "unimpressive." In the white, racist gaze the black man's penis can be anything but "unremarkable." The adjective in the first meaning recurs in the autopsy report a number of times as medical investigator Payne persistently judges the "remarkability" or "unremarkability," "normality," or "abnormality" of various aspects of Brown's dead body, such as his inner organs, for example "unfixed brain," which is "essentially normal"; or his personal hygiene, which is "good," since "no unusual odor is detected" (qtd. after Morris 111). Thus the closing gesture of Goldsmith's text seems to emulate the evaluative character of the original autopsy, manifesting the same race-based fantasies that pushed Wilson to image Brown as a science-fiction monster figure that can hardly be put down by 8 bullets.

The catalog of body parts has one more meaning that slumbers deep in the subconscious of black-white people relationships, and its connected with eugenicist practice of dismemberment performed for the sake of revealing pseudoscientific truth about the hideousness and inferiority of the black body. As Joey De Jesus observes, Michael Brown, being dismembered by Goldsmith, inevitably reminds the reader of Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman, the South African, Hottentot Venus, who was exhibited in circuses, first in London and then in Paris, as a missing link between animals and human beings (De Jesus). After her death in 1815, Baartman's body was bought by Georges Cuvier, professor of comparative anatomy at the Museum of Natural History in Paris. Cuvier dissected her body and displayed her remains. For more than a century and a half, visitors to the Museum of Man in Paris could view her brain, skeleton and genitalia as well as a plaster cast of her body. Her remains were returned to South Africa in 2002 and she was buried in the Eastern Cape on South Africa's Women's Day.

What Kenneth Goldsmith fails to achieve in "The Body of Michael Brown"—and what was the greatest asset of his previous projects—is an artistically convincing

recontextualization of his source material. According to Jonathon Sturgeon, this process relies on "metanoia" defined by William James as the changing of mind that comes with a shifting context (Sturgeon). In *The Weather*, the gargantuan accumulation of the weather forecasts produces a surprising effect of the sublime emerging from linguistic flotsam and jetsam, which enables the reader to see our planet as a Shelleyan scene for fighting elements. "The Body of Michael Brown," contrarily, does not defamiliarize the autopsy and does not shift it to a new literary context, revealing its new dimensions. As Surgeon has it, "the document doesn't escape white appropriation or find salvation under the blessed light of the literary" and instead is "plunged back into whiteness," which is Goldsmith's own whiteness and the whiteness of an elite academic institution that invited the poet (Sturgeon).

The problem with the new conceptual art practice is that it often disregards the ethical dimension of creation, which Charles Altieri defines as "not a matter of what things mean, but of who we become in our dealings with those meanings or efforts to mean" (641). For Goldsmith, ethical issues in art are limited to the question of "faithful" copying/rewriting, regardless of the fact that an appropriated text always reflects editorial manipulation and politics behind it (loc. 2129). Goldsmith thinks of himself as a daring disciple of Duchamp, but he fails to understand that his text propagates racist violence, performing anew the autopsy's latent, institutional racism. The artist Faith Holland, who attended Goldsmith's reading, wrote on Twitter: "Just saw Kenneth Goldsmith read Michael Brown's autopsy report for 30 minutes and no one knew wtf to do with that" (Flood). Author of *Bad Feminist*, essayist Roxane Gay, called Goldsmith's poem "tacky" on Twitter, highlighting "the audacity of reading an autopsy report and calling it poetry" (Flood). The writer and professor tweeted: "Kenneth Goldsmith has reached new racist lows yet elite institutions continue to pay him guest speaker fees" (Flood).

Very soon more severe criticism of Goldsmith's performance came from activists and radical writers. Editor of online arts magazine *Queen's Mob*, P. E. Garcia, observes:

> For Kenneth Goldsmith to stand on stage, and not be aware that his body—his white male body, a body that is a symbol loaded with a history of oppression, of literal dominance and ownership of black bodies—is a part of the performance, then he has failed to notice something drastically important about the 'contextualization' of this work… He should accept the pain his audience felt. He should accept that we might look at him and only see another white man holding the corpse of a black child saying, 'Look at what I've made.' (Garcia)

Garcia pins down the white avant-garde artist's unwillingness—or inability—to take into account his own whiteness: any treatment of a black body by a white person—especially of an innocent black murder victim—inevitably replicates a violent history of privatized black bodies. In his poem, Goldsmith reinscribes and thus reinforces

this history. As a result, in Jonathon Sturgeon parlance, "a poem meant to illuminate racism ended up performing it" (*Flavorwire*).

In her "Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde," Cathy Park Hong aptly observes that artistic avant-garde's attitude towards race has been no different than that of mainstream institutions, which prefer their artists to create sterile, accessible works on family and origin rather than make sweeping institutional critiques (Hong). Hong defines the avant-gardes delusion of whiteness as the "luxurious opinion that anyone can be 'post-identity' and can casually slip in and out of identities like a video game avatar, when there are those who are consistently harassed, surviving, profiled, or deported for whom they are" (Hong). Renouncing subject and voice is no more anti-authoritarian than any artistic procedure, and the disenfranchised may actually still need such bourgeois ornaments like *voice* to alter conditions of their existence. Thus, as De Jesus concludes, conceptualism may be a new form of cultural dominance, because its relationship to "found text" cannot be separated from the "colonial impulse to claim" (De Jesus). The conceptual artist conflates accessibility with entitlement and his or her dependence on appropriation resembles exploitation of raw materials. More importantly, since the text as material is readily available at any moment, one is entitled to it regardless of how that text came into existence, which means that "nothing we express can be ours—not our suffering, not our power" (De Jesus).

We should have a look at the conceptual artistic procedures yet from another perspective. In his recent works, Jacques Rancière touches on the complex relationship between the ethical and aesthetical spheres of the work of art. In "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics, Politics, Knowledge," Rancière reminds us that the *ethical* is best understood in the original sense of *ethos*, which originally had meant abode before it started to mean "the way of being that suits an abode" (3). Conceptual poetry—decontextualized and dependent on technology—has no "abode" in acts of communication between selves, whose existence it negates. This type of poetry simply does not belong to a sphere of experience as a "faculty possessed in common by all those who belong to a location" (4). According to the French philosopher, such a decline in ethics is the problem with all "mechanical" arts—including photography and film—which are most often recognized as "techniques of reproduction or transmission" and perceived as "anonymous" (48).

It seems that Kenneth Goldsmith's "The Death of Michael Brown" surprisingly reveals limits of literary conceptualism. Rather than an innovative mode of culture production, conceptual poetry is the result of recent capitalism, instilling in people the need to consume the texts that surround them, especially on the Internet. Consequently, conceptual poetry excludes those of us who do not have the luxury to abandon our identity, because, as Hong has it, "even in [conceptualists'] best effort in erasure, in complete transcription, in total paratactic scrambling, there is always a subject—and beyond that, the specter of the author's visage—and that specter is never, no matter how vigorous the erasure, raceless" (Hong). Moreover, conceptualism

seems to represent the category of artistic creation that Jacques Rancière calls the arts of mechanical reproduction, rooted in the aesthetic logic of visibility and privileging landscapes of grandeur. Thus, it reflects no ethos and is prone to manipulation, which is clear in Goldsmith's poem.

Works Cited

Altieri, Charles. "Avant-Garde or Arrière-Garde in Recent American Poetry." *Poetics Today* 20.4 (Winter 1999): 629-653. Print.

De Jesus, Joey. "Goldsmith, Conceptualism and the Half-Baked Rationalization of White Idiocy." *Apogee*. 18 Mar. 2015. Web. 28 June 2017. Web.

Flood, Alison. "US Poet Defends Reading of Michael Brown Autopsy Report As a Poem." *The Guardian*. 17 Mar. 2015. Web. 28 June, 2017.

Garcia, P. E. "The Body of Kenneth Goldsmith." *Queen's Mob*. Mar. 2015. Web. 28 June 2017.

Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. Kindle edition.

———. *The Weather*. Electronic Poetry Center. Buffalo: State University of New York. No date. Web. 28 June 2017.

———. "Why Conceptual Writing? Why Now?" *Against Expression. An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*. Ed. Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2011. xvii-xxii. Print.

Hong, Cathy, Park. "Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde." *Lana Turner: A Journal of Poetry and Opinion* 7. No date. Web. 28 June 2017.

Keats, John. *John Keats: Poetry Manuscripts at Harvard*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1990. Print.

"Mike Brown Complete Autopsy Report." *Scribd*. No date. Web. 28 June 2017.

Morris, Daniel. *Not Born Digital: Poetics, Print Literacy, New Media*. New York: Bloomsbury Academics, 2016. Print.

Perloff, Marjorie. *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986. Print.

———. *Poetics in a New Key: Interviews and Essays*. Ed. David Jonathan Y. Bayot. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 2013. Print.

———. *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*. Chicago and London: The U of Chicago P, 2010. Print.

Rancière, Jacques. "The Aesthetic Dimension: Aesthetics. Politics, Knowledge." *Critical Inquiry* 36.1 (Autumn 1999): 1-19. Print.

———. *The Politics of the Aesthetics*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.

Rettberg, Eric. "Goldsmith and 'The Body of Michael Brown.'" *Eric Rettberg Blog*. 25 Mar. 2015. Web. 28 June 2017.

Sanburn, Josh. "All the Ways Darren Wilson Described Being Afraid of Michael Brown." *Time Magazine* (25 November 2014). Web. 28 June 2017.

Sinyangwe, Sam. *Mapping Police Violence*. Web. 28 June 2017.

Sturgeon, Jonathon. "Kenneth Goldsmith's 'The Body of Michael Brown': How a Poem Meant to Illuminate Racism Ended Up Performing It." *Flavorwire*. 18 Mar. 2015. Web. 28 June 2017.

Weinberger, Eliot. "Introduction." Charles Reznikoff. *Testimony*. Jaffrey, NH: Black Sparrow Press, 2015. Print.

REVIEW ESSAY

Zbigniew Maszewski

What Is "New" in Faulkner Criticism?

Taylor Hagood. *Following Faulkner: The Critical Response to Yoknapatawpha's Architect.* **Rochester: Camden House, 2017. 153 pages.**

When in 1954 in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech Hemingway claimed that "[f]or a true writer each book should be a new beginning, where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment" and that "[h]e should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed" (805-806), he was following, unknowingly as it seems and with no sense of anxiety, the statement Faulkner had made on the same occasion in Stockholm four years earlier when he spoke of the writer "creating out of the materials of the human spirit something that did not exist before" (qtd. in Hagood 3) and the belief Faulkner expressed in interviews and class conferences that the book's worth is to be judged by the splendor of its failure, a demonic mark of literary excellence and of literary heritage behind continuing efforts to attempt the impossible. Imaginative returns to the beginnings of the writers' work once its position within the world literary canon has been confirmed significantly and securely, these declarations owe much to the modernist spirit. "Something" in them reminds one of "it" in Pound's "make it new." The call for the pursuit of the elusive, timeless phantom of perfection which is also the pursuit of the aesthetic means capable of meeting the needs of the changing times remains part of the definition of literature. From the era of the "great" modernists the call may have lost some of its enthusiasm and openness. Yet, even if toned down, moderated, ironically self-conscious, it never fails to be attractive. In *Watermark* (1989), for example, Joseph Brodsky remembers his early appreciation of Pound's work—its youthful insolence, diversity, range of cultural references and its "make it new" formula—during his walks along Fondamenta Nuove and Fondamenta degli Incurabili in Venice. They are very nostalgic walks of an experienced man of letters and they allow his critical "I"/"eye" to see through the *nebia* of falsehood in judgments and declarations which remain stagnant, resist any views that might challenge their inertia (see Brodsky's

darkly anecdotal account of his and Susan Sontag's visit to the house of Olga Rudge, Pound's wife).

It is not possible to estimate the importance of the interest writers, critics, literary historians, academics and all the mutant forms of these have taken in both Faulkner's claim for originality and in Faulkner's indebtedness to others. The awareness of the magnitude of critical commentaries his work has received may prove to be something of a burden in the attempts to approach it with new energy. Yet, their number is growing and Faulkner's reputation as a master of American literature one could support one's own reputation with stands high, though perhaps not as high as it once did. "The eye of William Faulkner is a defining eye," Noel Polk wrote in the "Afterword" to *Eudora Welty on William Faulkner* and by the eye he meant the ways the works of southern writers "since Faulkner" tend to be perceived through the lens of Faulkner's influence, the patterns of evading it and of denying it, the latter providing "the most compelling evidence of how completely inescapable he [Faulkner] and his work are." It is critics rather than writers, Polk observes, who have been "overwhelmed" by Faulkner, who "have felt that Faulkner alone has defined the terms by which we can talk about the South" (75-76). Taylor Hagood's *Following Faulkner: The Critical Response to Yoknapatawpha's Architect* follows Polk's and other critics' concern with the question of Faulkner's legacy by elevating it to the position of a presence defining, because never satisfactorily defined by, the developments of critical thought. In the "Introduction" to the book, Hagood writes: "Often when new modes of criticism arise critics look to test them on Faulkner's writing, which in turn bolsters his critical *caché*. It is partly because scholars so often test their theories on his work that it continues to be so prominent, while at the same time theories gain prominence by engaging Faulkner" (1). Neither "often" nor "partly" detracts from the book's merits as a tribute to the expanding body of Faulkner scholarship, although or because some of its formulations, including the one quoted above, remain disputable.

To introduce the text on various practices of "following" by emphasizing and contextualizing the importance and the relevance of its subject matter, the one being followed, is of course as conventional as it is justifiable, especially when so many predecessors have felt compelled to do the same in their own ways. Equally compelling it is to approach the phenomenon of Faulkner and the phenomenon of its recognition with the stylistic method Faulkner himself is said to have put to masterly use: antithetical complementation. The opening sentence in Hunter Cole's "Forward" to *Eudora Welty on William Faulkner* is: "William Faulkner, a man of small physical stature but large literary worth, cast a long shadow in every direction" (9). (The metaphor, possibly indebted to Faulkner's way of defining the credibility of fictional characters, must have caught Hagood's eye, as he writes that Flannery O'Connor's comments on Faulkner's "overpowering" status "forecast the long shadow he would cast on other writers"; 24.) An intensely private man and a public figure known for his practices of posing and role playing; a man from a backwater place of economic poverty and high level of illiteracy who became the Nobel Prize winning author

of commanding vision, raising the provincial to universal, mythical dimensions; a writer whose imaginary world and the techniques he experimented with to create this world were immersed deeply in the history and culture of the American South but who himself claimed proudly and light-heartedly that when writing about his native environment he was "like a carpenter" who "uses the nearest hammer;" a writer whose work combines and reconciles the abstract and the concrete, the nuanced and the stereotypical, the disruptive and the traditional, the original and the borrowed, the insightful and the excessive—Faulkner provokes critical responses which recognize their roots in the pleasure of juxtaposition. In *Following Faulkner*, Hagood documents the principle and adheres to it in the titles he gives to his book's main chapters: "Genius in the Hinterland," "From New Critical Heights to Structural and Archival Groundings," "The Grip of Theory," "Global Faulkner."

The play of opposites, paradoxes and ambiguities, which can help pattern the complexity of his work, both major individual texts and their holistic organization into an expanding design, made Faulkner, in Hagood's words, "a convenient darling for the dominant movements of the 1960s and 1970s, New Criticism and structuralism" (25). It can indeed be argued that major commentaries on Faulkner dating from that period retain their strong position because, exhaustive and convincing in their own right in their own times, they provide a solid background for the flow of diverse, often contrasting perspectives they initiated. Olga W. Vickory's *The Novels of William Faulkner* (1959, revised in 1964); Michel Millgate's *The Achievement of William Faulkner* (1963, revised in 1966), Edmund L. Volpe's *A Reader's Guide to William Faulkner: The Novels* (1964) were among such groundbreaking books which helped, possibly continue to help, readers find their way into the complexity of Faulkner's texts and understand their role within larger contexts of world literature. Joseph Blotner's two-volume *Faulkner: A Biography*, first published in 1974, occupies a privileged position on the shelves of Faulkner scholars not so much for nostalgic reasons as because it is still used as an invaluable source of information about the author. Hagood's strategy is to demonstrate that these early texts on Faulkner's art and life remain helpful and informative also by raising reservations, letting us see question marks following their affirmative statements. Vickory's decisions about which summaries of Faulkner's texts to include in and which to leave out of her book might seem biased and no longer valid; Millgate's assumptions about the grounds for judging Faulkner's achievement might appear "masculinist and absolutist" (17); Volpe's claim that Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha did not evolve but was "discovered," complete with its family ghosts and intent on logic and unity, is debatable or "patently untrue" (19); Blotner's biography has "a lovingly personal touch" to its factual richness which might also account for the biographer's tendency to suppress "some unsavory details" in the writer's family life (22).

Walter J. Slatoff's *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner* (1960), which opens a series of presentations of books on Faulkner in the chapter "From New Critical Heights to Structural And Archival Groundings," is exemplary of the

New Critical approaches to the writer's work. Statoff's concern is with Faulkner's "polar imagination," the dependence of his world upon the tensions resulting from the play of "antithetic terms" (with stasis and mobility, silence and sound receiving the critic's special attention) remains primarily of aesthetic nature. The aesthetic vein highlighting the role of binaries dominates also in Richard P. Adams's *Faulkner: Myth and Motion* (1968), an examination of the significance of the concept of arrested motion in Faulkner's vision, and in Panthea R. Broughton's *William Faulkner: The Abstract and the Actual* (1974), which recognizes the distinguishing feature of that vision in Faulkner's avoidance of the falsehoods of abstraction by identifying it, in apparent contrast to the views held by Hemingway and Faulkner's other contemporaries, with the "elusiveness of truth," the destabilizing rather than insulating truth of the actual human experience. James Gray Watson's *The Snopes Dilemma: Faulkner's Trilogy* (1968), Walter Brylowski's *Faulkner's Olympian Laugh: Myth in the Novels* (1968), Elizabeth M. Kerr's *Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's "Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil"* (1969), Sally R. Page's *Faulkner's Women: Characterization and Meaning* (1972), and Arthur F. Kinney's *Faulkner's Narrative Poetics: Style and Vision* (1978) are among the other books whose contents Hagood chooses to encapsulate in his brief, one or two-paragraph long, discussions of the important contributions to Faulkner studies in the 1960s and 1970s, important for their ability to expand the range of critical perspectives and often to come into tension with each other. These two decades, Hagood writes, saw the field of Faulkner scholarship already becoming "crowded," the new individual voices finding it difficult to be "heard above the overwhelming scholarly clamor" (47). The chapter ends with the accounts of two books which attempted to accomplish the goal. In *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (1978), Cleanth Brooks demonstrates (for the first time on such a grand scale and with such great emphasis) how significant for the understanding of Faulkner's art is the reading of his early works, despite their imitative, Romantic leaning, and of his novels set "beyond" Yoknapatawpha *(Pylon, If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, and *A Fable*), despite their artistic deficiencies. Gary Lee Stonum's *Faulkner's Career: An Internal Literary History* (1979) (with which Hagood seems to have more patience than with Brooks's book) remains indebted to the ways New Criticism and structuralism were prepared to interpret Faulkner's vision, but it also opens up some original, unexplored theoretical territory in discussing various aspects of the concept of the writer's career, the one of particular relevance to Faulkner's being the relation between "the texts a writer has already written and the writing of new texts," the career "projected" and the career "achieved" (48).

In the third and the most substantial chapter of *Following Faulkner*, the "new" in the development of Faulkner studies is theoretical. As Hagood, in an intentionally provocative and hopefully refreshing way, introduces the subject of that section of his work, Faulkner's critics of the 1980s "needed something new to discuss if they were going to be able to carve up space for themselves" (50). The new in Faulkner criticism of the time embraced the emerging approaches to innovative linguistic and

psychological studies. It both followed and helped articulate the need to address hitherto largely neglected or repressed areas in literary scholarship, including language's, literature's and criticism's own dependence on ideological, social, political forces defined by the notions of race, ethnicity and gender. The theoretical "grip" on Faulkner, at its strongest representational level associated with the names of Barthes, Derrida, Lacan and Kristeva, commanded discursive modes which meant to "decenter" the writer's work on the one hand, but tended to enclose it within a hermetic, often jargon-ridden and mostly "European-based" perspectives on the other. Having acknowledged the above in anticipation of and in contrast to some critical texts on Faulkner which were to appear at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, Hagood proceeds with his task of providing, in chronological order, synthetic descriptions of the interpretative efforts which seem to have lost little of their power of influence. The chapter's main focus allows him to return briefly to a number of books on Faulkner's work dating from the 1970s but having their lines of argumentation rooted firmly in the theoretical ground. He claims John T. Irwin's *Doubling and Incest /Repetition and Revenge* (1975) to be "a tour-de-force of theory-based criticism" (56), an early attempt to investigate the mechanism of "following," voluntary or involuntary, in the textual patterns. Irwin's approach is psychoanalytical. It reads connections between Quentin Compson's own story as he tells it in *The Sound and the Fury* and as he tells it by telling the story of Thomas Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* in terms of the novels' correspondences with Freud's work, itself in dialogical relationship of influence with Nietzsche's thought. Though it fails to capture the complexity of the Southern social setting, Myra Jehlen's *Class and Character in Faulkner's South* (1976) is given credit for effectively breaking away with the New Critical tendency to disregard a "sense of history," shaping rather than providing a background to Faulkner's major texts. Donald M. Kartinger's interest in the "protean," the "unstable," the "deferred" (with *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* productively illuminated by it) places his *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels* (1979) in the vicinity of admittedly the most thorough and insightful discussion of Faulkner to be attempted from Derrida's viewpoint: John Matthews's *The Play of Faulkner's Language* (1982). Matthews's "play" with the two posits the fluid substance of "partnership" between Faulkner's Southern practice of storytelling and Derrida's poststructuralist practice of decentering, for both the text never attaining, nor truly wishing to attain, any satisfactory level of permanence in the meaning beyond its own self-regenerative drive. Such is also the critical angle adopted by the French critic André Bleikasten whose early work on Faulkner dates from the 1970s but whose greatest contribution to the field (which Hagood recognizes by having it open the list of those in "the grip of theory") is *The Ink of Melancholy: Faulkner's Novels from "The Sound and the Fury" to "Light in August,"* published in 1990. The center which Bleikasten finds and celebrates in Faulkner's novels is that of loss, an emptiness never to be filled by expanding layers of textual sedimentation and repeated efforts to construct a self, for a writer a source of creative freedom, for the

text a source of its openness to interpretation.

The deconstruction of the patriarchal structures in the Southern culture became the subject matter of several important books on Faulkner in the 1990s. Hagood quotes a fragment from Minrose C. Gwin's *The Feminine and Faulkner: Reading (Beyond) Sexual Difference* (1990): "To question Faulkner about those gaps, those ruptures in his text, is simply to follow where he leads; for he has taught us to listen as much to what language does not say as to what it does" (84). The gaps, the raptures, the silenced, as well as the exceeding, the overflowing, the flooded speak of the feminine in Faulkner's (and are read as elements of the feminist theoretical discourse) underlying and undermining the masculinist order. Drawing on feminist criticism, most notably Kristeva's, Deborah Clarke's *Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner* (1994) proposes that central to a new understanding of the role of Faulkner's women characters is "the transformative power of the mother," Faulkner's ability to disrupt stereotypical, cultural constructs by "dissolving boundaries between self and other, semiotic and symbolic" (qtd. in Hagood 92-93). Thus, Faulkner's somewhat off-hand remark "if a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate" acquires in itself a strongly symbolic status, but one that expresses his desire (repressed/ criminal?) to take over the "literal creative power" of the mother as a physical body rather than an object of idealization. The feminist approach encounters the tenets of Lacan's theory in Doreen Fowler's *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed* (1997). Acknowledging her indebtedness to Irwin's strategy, Fowler attempts another intertextual reading: in hers, Lacan's key concepts (the mirror stage, the imaginary, the symbolic, the Name-of-the-Father) become exemplified and explained by giving insights into and finding their relevance to Faulkner's life and Faulkner's writings. In Hagood's final commentary, while some will see in Fowler's method acts of "tortur[ing] a text to the point it will admit to anything," he is ready to recognize the importance of the effort it makes to reveal what he calls the text's "deep psychology" (95).

Eric Sundquist's *Faulkner: The House Divided* from 1983 was one of the first critical texts to deal predominantly with the issue of race in Faulkner's writings. For the purpose of discussing Faulkner's preoccupation with the effect of slavery, the book favors *Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses* over Faulkner's earlier works, their achievement measured by the gravity of the writer's confrontation with the experience of the South. The year 1983 also saw the publication of Thadious M. Davis's *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context*, the significance of the word "Negro" organizing the book's critical argument in the function of the basic signifier, a cultural, white man's concept antedating the use of the word "black," belonging properly to the historical and social context at the time Faulkner wrote his fictions and of the time Faulkner wrote about. In Davis's commentary, Hagood notices, "the Negro" "represents both division in society and paradoxically also wholeness—a connection and a disconnect between the two races" (63).

The deconstructive and decentering tendencies in following Faulkner criticism over the two decades in "the grip of theory" relate also to the revision of

attitudes towards the very concept of the Faulkner canon. Hans H. Skei, James B. Carothers and James Ferguson brought to attention Faulkner's short stories, their autonomy and their interconnectedness in relation to each other and to Faulkner's novels (sometimes revised and incorporated into them), generally, rightly or wrongly, believed to be of superior artistic value. A strong contribution to the broadening scope of Faulkner criticism was made by Judith L. Sensibar's *The Origins of Faulkner's Art* (1984). The originality of Sensibar's study consists in demonstrating how enlightening for following his literary career is an in-depth examination of Faulkner's early poetry (*The Lilacs*, *Visions of Spring)* and of the play he himself illustrated (*The Marionettes)*, the two sharing the Pierrot figure which, although discarded together with the writer's poetic and dramatic experiments, continues to wear various masks and give multiple voices to Faulkner's characters in his mature fictions. In a fragment from the book quoted in *Following Faulkner*, it is interesting to notice again how its critical argument benefits from the perception of antithetical drives informing Faulkner's aesthetic vision (a possible claim for its greatness as much an indicator of its "rambling" quality): one to "distill" and the other to "tell a tale."

The chapter "Global Faulkner" opens with a proposition that much of what has been written on Faulkner at the beginning of the twenty-first century remains under the sign of "Faulkner and _____," the new being the name or the concept following _____. It is, like so much else in the domain of the critical, academic commentary, a political sign, and in the sense of the "global contextualization of Faulkner," it answers the need to turn away from traditional, often "nationalistic" ways of seeing in Faulkner a representative American Southern writer, including those which privilege the European prism. The new terms which appear in Hagood's book to account for the change in the development of Faulkner studies are New Southernists and the Global South, the first referring to commentators seeking more nuanced and diversified approaches, the second to the perspective they endorse. The terms place Faulkner in a somewhat defensive position. As Hagood eloquently puts it: "in a time when interest in white male writers paled before that in non-English-descended, nonwhite, nonmale writers of a variety of ethnicities and races, tweedy, silver-haired Faulkner looked dull at best and representative of smug empowerment itself, an apotheosis of oppressive, conservative, dominant culture" (102). Interestingly, one of the early voices which came to the rescue is that of the black Martinique writer, Édouard Glissant, whose *Faulkner, Mississippi* (originally published in French in 1996, translated into English in 1999) discovers connections between the experience of the United States South and the experience of the Caribbean. In the presentations of books which in the chapter begins with Glissant's, Faulkner may actually seem to take a second place in relation to the field his name is associated with and his work helps to define in a yet unexplored, or from today's viewpoint not properly explored context. The elusiveness of Faulkner's meaning becomes its inclusiveness.

According to Richard Godden's *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* (1997), Faulkner's work is "best understood" through

an analysis of a historically and racially determined "labor trauma," a change in the patterns of interdependency between the white landowner and the black slave and sharecropper, a change defined by Godden as "a primal scene of recognition during which white passes into black and black passes into white along perpetual tracks necessitated by a singular and pervasively coercive system of production" (qtd. in Hagood 104). In *Faulkner and the Discourses of Culture* (2005), Hagood writes, Charles Hannon "contextualizes Faulkner's polyvocal fictional texts with the extratextual discourses of their moment" (in the praised "uncanonical" discussion of *The Unvanquished* opposing that of the Agrarians with W. E. B. Du Bois's) as well as with the current discourses on race, class and labor applying to Faulkner's texts "a cultural materialist lens" (112-113). Hosam Aboul-Ela's *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality and the Mariátegui Tradition* (2007) equates the Global South approach to Faulkner with the postcolonial reading of the economic factor as understood by the Peruvian José Carlos Moriátegui and his followers. Recent revisits to and revisions of Faulkner's biography include Judith L. Sensibar's *Faulkner and Love: The Women Who Shaped His Art* (2009) and Philip Weinstein's *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (2010). Sensibar re-writes the stories of Faulkner's mother, Maud Butler Faulkner, his wife, Estelle and the African American woman, Caroline Barr, known as "Mammy." The stories may not have been re-written had it not been for the presence of the name of the writer in the title's initial position, yet the critic's focus is invariably, and especially with reference to what has been said or not said about Estelle, on the women's lives. Weinstein's speculation on "becoming" as "the uncertainty of the present moment" invites the potential reader to join him on an imaginative and factual journey into Faulkner's life in which Weinstein's own voice takes the risk of becoming one with his subject's own experience ("All he [Faulkner] knew for sure was that he could not move, though he could not remember why. Where was he anyway?" (qtd. in Hagood 124)). In a sense, the reader's interest in Faulkner's life (is it not taken for granted?) must "become" her interest in the way Weinstein is telling it. Published in 2017, Hagood's account of studies devoted to Faulkner's biography could not include André Bleikasten's *William Faulkner: A Life Trough Novels,* translated into English in the same year (in France published in 2007). Among other books "Global Faulkner" devotes more space to are: James Watson's *William Faulkner: Self-Presentation and Performance* (2000), Karl Zender's *Faulkner and the Politics of Reading* (2002), Ted Atkinson's *Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology and Cultural Politics* (2006), Hagood's own *Faulkner's Imperialism: Space, Place, and the Materiality of Myth* (2008), and Cadace Waid's *The Signifying Eye: Seeing Faulkner's Art* (2013). The last one deserves special attention for its insightful, innovative perceptions of the meaning of Faulkner's drawings (the clock and a male figure by the pond in a 1910 drawing for his mother; Pierrot, Marietta and the shape of the black space between them in a drawing for *The Marionettes*), anticipating the writer's later fictional patterns.

     In the introduction to his book, Hagood insists that it be read as a "*narrative,*"

chronologically unfolding for organizational and informative clarity, past-oriented (the annual *American Literary Scholarship* will keep us updated) and selective by necessity. The narrative demonstrates that, branching out and gaining in depth, the field of Faulkner criticism is becoming increasingly more dense. It is that density, reflected by the proliferation of influential names and influential titles in the main parts of the book, that makes the narrative tension fall in its last chapter titled, some might say too ambitiously, "Forecast: Future Trends in Faulkner's Scholarship." This does not surprise, as what these trends might be is simply impossible to know now. The "forecast" (not an "epilogue") is actually the assumption, well-grounded in the past and returning to the primary idea behind Hagood's whole project, that Faulkner scholarship will not cease to productively intersect with other disciplines in responding to intellectual challenges of our time. In a sequence of paragraphs the "forecast" lists and briefly explains exemplary areas of current interest: disability studies, studies of whiteness, so called "nonhuman" and "thing" studies, queer studies, film and popular culture studies (the last, understandably, seeking some energizing support from the "undead" in Faulkner). Finally, Hagood acknowledges the role of digital platforms in giving unprecedented access to Faulkner's texts and texts on Faulkner, allowing the internet users to catalogue and order as well as to see unexpected patterns and hidden connections.

Hagood wrote an engaging, at times compelling narrative. Packed with information, it is relatively fast-paced. His is a "telescoping" rather than "defining" eye. It particularizes in its attention to telling details in individual perspectives and it generalizes in its perception of the benefits of periodization, chronology, ideological and theoretical background. Its undoubted merit is the ability to provide brilliantly concise, scholarly rigorous but also clear, highly approachable framework to the parts and to the whole. Knowing that the processes through which components build up a picture often communicate a sense of conflict and contradiction, his authorial eye tries to offer balanced views and avoid strongly polemical approach without resigning entirely from the pleasure of expressing personal appreciation or the lack of it. In any case, to be chosen for the commentary (and some texts are not), the critical material must seem important for the author. It is because *Following Faulkner* succeeds in achieving what it aims at that it occasionally tends to be repetitive. The responsibility of doing justice to every new text under analysis is naturally helped by such words as "but," "although," and their variants to control the argumentative construct. Readers may find a little puzzling the frequent use, sometimes more than twice on a page, of the word "moment," as in: "Faulkner's moment," "the historical moment of Thomas Sutpen," "Faulknerian scholarly climate of the moment," "Brook's moment," "the shift of its [the book's] moment," "Faulkner plugged into a forward-moving modern moment," "conservative societal ideals of its moment," "our moment" etc. There are simply too many "moments" here, however deliberately the word is used to denote a specific social, political and cultural context and even though it is from the accumulation of such key moments of critical focus that Hogood's book gathers

its momentum.

Hagood's *Following Faulkner* belongs to the series *Studies in American Literature and Culture: Literary Criticism in Perspective*, published by Camden House. As in the case of Laurence W. Mazzeno's *The Critics and Hemingway, 1924-2014: Shaping an American Literary Icon* (reviewed in these pages in vol. 10, 2016), the question one may want to ask oneself concerns the book's "target audience." A note from the Editor explains that studies appearing in the series are intended: "to address a readership consisting of scholars, students of literature at the graduate and undergraduate level, and a general reader." This particular contribution to the series may have a better chance with the middle group than with the other two. If a scholar shows his or her ignorance about the proper context in which to put an argument or a quotation, Hagood writes in the introduction, the scholar's "credibility could be compromised" (1) (they will see their colleagues' eyebrows raised? be less likely to be invited to conferences and get their articles published? have their academic status threatened?). Surely, not many of them would be willing to admit their need to give *Following Faulkner* a close reading for such reasons. It is the students who, by definition, as it were, would/should welcome the opportunity of having their "awareness of what to say and how to say it" significantly deepened by what the book has to say. *Following Faulkner* will be their helpful, although at times demanding, guide to Faulkner studies. The first pages of each chapter provide rather student-friendly introductions to critical theory, should the students still find that territory unfamiliar and threatening. As for "a general reader," who is she that one immediately gets to like her? The feeling one sometimes has when reading *Following Faulkner* is that for all its scholarly seriousness and for all the sublimated level of satisfaction its discourse may give, somehow it misses "a general reader." There are signs of it in fragments of Hagood's text where it loosens its logical and balanced grip and lets in some fresh air. When, for example, he writes about Sally Wolff's discovery of Francis Terry Leak's diary and the old plantation ledgers which Faulkner read before writing *Go Down, Moses* (*Ledgers of History: William Faulkner, an Almost Forgotten Friendship, and an Antebellum Diary,* 2010), Hagood takes notice of the "unparalleled excitement" of "follow[ing] an author so closely" and Wolff's "wonderful job of conveying that thrill" (126). He seems enthusiastic about Weinstein's attempts to "experience" Faulkner, come into his mind, live "within Faulkner's life," and about Glissant's narrative which "does not participate deeply in the academic conversation" but has "an impressionistic way" of "relating experience" (103). Or, he includes a lengthy quote from the opening pages of *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner* (1989), where Stephen M. Ross recalls his "epiphany:" sitting on a campus bench and thinking about Quentin Compson, he lets his thoughts be filled with the students' many voices around him and then becomes ready to embrace what is "new to [him]," "a greater comprehension of the effect Faulkner had on [him]." In Hagood's commentary: "Ross's anecdote, I think, shows how a deep listening to one's own self, which may take some time, can eventually bring forth the answer,

and this quickens scholarship beyond its theoretical findings, giving it life. A scholar does well to borrow Faulkner's great energy, to follow him as Ross does here" (79). In such "moments," writing about the critic but also writing about himself, Hogood, well-versed in reader-response theory, talks to "a general reader," that is a new reader, and not so much of Faulkner criticism as of Faulkner himself. He speaks of a longing for some "primary," deeply personal, both emotional and intellectual experience of reading Faulkner, which is not necessarily the first or the unaided reading of Faulkner. In fact, such an experience can no longer be "innocent" (see Karl Zender's *Faulkner and the Politics of Reading*, 2002), but it is a kind of response which regains the power of immediacy.

I finish by looking again at the cover of Hogood's book with the figure of William Faulkner against the brick wall in the background. I believe I can read the photograph's symbolic relevance. I like the sound of and the idea behind *Following Faulkner*. I am not sure about the subtitle: *The Critical Response to Yoknapatawpha's Architect.* "Yoknapatawpha" would favor the "canonized" version of the critical response, leaving out what is "beyond" much against what I think is Hogood's preferred way of thinking in his book; the word "architect" suggests someone in control of the structure he is deliberately, consciously designing, possibly only one of the ways of looking at Faulkner, while Hogood's interest in the polyphonous author and his sensitivity to the flow of words and the flow of ideas always calls for others.

Works Cited

Baker, Carlos. *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*. London: Penguin Books, 1969. Print.
Welty, Eudora. *On William Faulkner.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003. Print.

REVIEWS

Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera. *After American Studies: Rethinking the Legacies of Transnational Exceptionalism*. **New York: Routledge, 2018. 186 pages.**

Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera, in his book *After American Studies*: *Rethinking the Legacies of Transnational Exceptionalism*, offers the readers a thought-provoking insight into cultural studies within the domain of the US political and cultural realities. He starts with a dedication in Spanish "Para Santiago." Though at first sight it may seem ambiguous whether the author devotes his opus to a particular person, in the course of the book one develops a gradually more grounded impression that this is Santiago from *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. This claim seems justified if we take several factors into account: the dedication is in Spanish, whereas the rest of the book (despite occasional insertions in Spanish) is in English; it coincides with Herlihy-Mera quoting Hemingway as having said, "I consider myself Cuban…. I do not want them to consider me a Yankee" (67). And since the protagonist was an American living in Cuba, he might be considered a trans-nationalist, crossing geographic borders, proclaiming his own way of life in striving against adversities, professing a unique form of religion that relied on transcending limitations and age. These aspects function as milestone points of reference for Herlihy-Mera.

The main intention of the book is to analyze how diverse facets of the US state machinery perpetuate dominant, frequently iterated, cultural canons that are to comprehensively shape hyphenated residents into a merged-together nation. In other words, the purpose is to pinpoint the factors that create the initial dichotomy of "us" vs. "them," and are geared towards the construction of a transnational and unifying "we." In Herlihy-Mera's view, this aims at forging an unhyphenated member of American society, bearing such traits as heterosexual monogamist living in a nuclear family, willingly partaking in capitalist and industrialized modes of life, and speaking English as a dominant language. The author imposes strong valuations on such a paradigm, calling it a "racist and racialized, politicized, and Eurocentric myth" (4). He sees this appropriation of geographical borders, the imposition of social and political status, enforced enculturation through domineering language and cultural practices as steps willingly taken to wield power of one dominant group over the others. What seems to elude Herlihy-Mera's attention here is the fact that this point might be treated as bearing traces of overgeneralization and one-sidedness, since one may get an impression that the groups of immigrants that came to the US and willingly subjected themselves to diverse forms of patriation (to use Herlihy-Mera's

term) were not taken into account. Though the author refers to patriation as "enforced enculturation," Samuel P. Huntington claims that immigrants "generally, *wanted* to be Americans" (188).

The unquestionable asset of this book is that it presents in a persuasive way a myriad of ways through which the US political and cultural machine tries to evoke patriation. A significant role in the process of patriation is played by public education. It is the sphere where individual identities are being shaped, thus when in the process of growing up one is exposed to the "officially" sanctioned language, myths, and traditions, supported with the authority of teachers and professors, one becomes susceptible to imposed, implicit and explicit operations. It is done in language and through language, which though not officially endorsed by the state, is English. What goes with it is the regulated celebration of festivities, commemoration of heroes and veneration of traditions that the hegemony of English brings along. It refers to social norms and regulations, such as authorized visa application procedures or visa waiver programs, or manifestations of public identification through frequent recitations of the most explicit act of civic belonging—the Pledge of Allegiance. It is also aptly done and strengthened through literary canons, whose function, among others, is to eradicate the hyphenation of diverse ethnic groups living in the US. What seems interesting here is the fact that sometimes non-English writers use a different paradigm for English than that of a dominant language, as noted by Herlihy-Mera; they let their protagonists use English as a language of prophesies of one's misfortunes and bad luck. If one juxtaposes this interpretation with that of English being a hegemonic language, one is tempted to think that it was not a coincidence that Herlihy-Mera chose English for his book.

Apart from the language, what is at play when it comes to binding diverse groups together, are the media and art. They both serve to perpetuate the collective myth of civil rights and strengthen unity among the groups, or weaken it, thus differentiating "us" from "them." They selectively show images that would substantiate the workings of the US political and cultural body, while at the same time eradicating or silencing those that would not fit in the pattern. In Herlihy-Mera's eyes, this form of "forced acculturation" is a manifestation of a soft form of violence imposed on minority groups by the majority.

Such a supposition must have inevitably led Jeffrey Herlihy-Mera to postulate the following: "It is time to unplug American (and other area) Studies from geographies, languages, citizenships, collectivities, cultures, and political molds, and their emancipations of already power" (150). He sees all the above mentioned aspects as confines imposed on the potential of one's full realization. If it is to come to fruition, one has to go beyond these limitations.

Herlihy-Mera believes that the category that still remains unscathed and thus may offer various tangible results of academic analysis, is the Age. Since it functions as a common denominator and a frequent reference point for diverse people, Herlihy-Mera claims that it could perform a similar function in cultural and American studies.

Groups, consisting of individuals coming to the US, could utilize it as an opportunity to create common identity. At the current stage of social, political, and cultural praxis the author's postulation seems highly progressive and groundbreaking. It seems to echo John Lennon's appeal from his famous song "Imagine"—there is no countries, no possessions, no religions—the only thing one is left with is one's imagination. And as it was with Lennon, so it is with Herlihy-Mera: though the world does not seem to be ready for such brave pronouncements yet, the book is worth reading for its wide scope of analysis and daring propositions heading into the future.

Work Cited

Huntington, Samuel P. *Who Are We? America's Great Debate*. London: Simon and Schuster, 2005. Print.

<div style="text-align:right">

Jacek Romaniuk
University of Warsaw

</div>

David Parrish. *Jacobitism and Anti-Jacobitism in the British Atlantic World, 1688-1727*. Woodbridge and Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2017. 189 pages.

When Paul Kleber Monod praised the input of multidisciplinary Jacobite Studies into our understanding of the political and cultural makeup of the British Isles between 1688 and the mid-eighteenth century, he also called for further inquiry into a host of unexplored Jacobite topics ("A Restoration?"). While his list of blank spots was territorially restricted to the British Isles and the Jacobite diaspora on the European continent, David Parrish identified one more major gap and filled it with his recently published study on *Jacobitism and Anti-Jacobitism in the British Atlantic World*. He worked under the premise that the period 1688-1727 (the escape of James II Stuart to France, the invitation and coronation of William and Mary, three Jacobite rebellions and the reign of the first Hanoverian monarch) was not only eventful and stormy in Britain, but equally so in the British colonies in America. The review of the historiography of British and diasporic Jacobitism leads Parrish to the observation that no prior attempt has been made at integrating the local in-depth insights and advances of Jacobite Studies into a more comprehensive study of the British Atlantic political culture of the period, with all its heterogeneity, dynamism and complexity. Parrish's work aims at filling the void by making use of the existing scholarship and complimenting it with new evidence and interpretation.

Consequently, he argues a twofold thesis: 1) that the divisions and conflicts in the Metropolis reverberated in British colonial America to an extent not yet fully recognized in the early Atlantic historiography, and 2) that the colonial engagement

in the Jacobite disputes somewhat paradoxically acted as an integrating factor of the British transatlantic culture of the time. Starting with the definition of Jacobitism formulated earlier by Monod as "a subcultural element of a larger *English* political culture" (1), he broadens it for his purpose into "an important element in an eighteenth-century *British Atlantic* culture" (2, emphasis added). Hence, Jacobitism and anti-Jacobitism function in the book not only as mere topics in a political history study but also, and more importantly, as instruments in the process of the cultural anglicisation of the British Atlantic.

Parrish organized his argument along the triangular relationship of Jacobitism, ecclesiastical politics and party politics, all intricately interwoven and spanning the British Atlantic political and cultural world of the period. He further assumes the operation of two equations within the triangle: 1) Jacobite=Tory=High Church of England and 2) anti-Jacobitism=Whig=Low Church of England and dissenting churches. In both equations, the element foregrounded by the author as chiefly responsible for the fluctuations of power and influence in the British Atlantic empire was the increased partisanship within the English Parliament after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 until about 1715, commonly known in historiography as the rage of party. The main axes of conflict were the Tories, opposing the violation of the Stuart divine right to the throne (Jacobitism), and the Whigs, supporting the Protestant succession (anti-Jacobitism). Mindful of the fact that crucial decisions concerning the American colonies were made by Parliament and its committees in London, Parrish traces the reiterations of the metropolitan party struggle in various parts of British colonial America.

The author divided the book into two parts. In Part I entitled "Context" he sensibly skips another detailed characterization of British party and ecclesiastical politics of the period, referring the reader to the existing vast scholarship. Instead, he deals with the transatlantic dynamics of actions and reactions, always meticulously highlighting the role of Jacobite and anti-Jacobite leanings in the maze of imperial politics. In the entire section, Parrish sticks to his triangular model, discussing each "arm" of the triangle in a separate chapter: party politics (Chapter 1), religious belief (Chapter 2), and the public sphere (Chapter 3). The section ends with a well-supported conclusion that Jacobitism and anti-Jacobitism in the British Empire at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were hardly stabilizing factors. On the contrary, they served to perpetuate local conflicts in what was already "a patchwork of diverse religious, political, ethnic and economic cultures" (13) in the British Isles and the colonies alike.

Part II consists of three separate well-evidenced case studies, each an in-depth analysis of a different example of the trans-Atlantic power game organized around the Jacobite and anti-Jacobite controversy. Each case comes from a different mainland colonial territory: the South, mid-Atlantic and New England. While all are valuable and interesting for different reasons, probably the best read is Chapter 5 devoted to the stormy tenure of Robert Hunter as governor of New York and New Jersey in 1710-

19. Hunter's dramatic story of balancing the High Church Tory pressures with the resentment of local dissenting church communities, the party alterations in London with the religious and political networks in his colonial Assemblies, and his own political instincts with the ambitions of some activists, functions like a lens through which one can appreciate the web of interests behind the Jacobite/anti-Jacobite contention. All that plus Hunter's skill to build and maintain a network of influential adherents in England, as well as to use the available PR tools to deprecate his political antagonists, make his case perfect material for a historical political thriller.

Each case study is in fact a self-contained essay with its own contextual introduction and conclusions. It makes them more useful for selective study outside the context of the entire book for various purposes, for instance in teaching or in narrow research projects in regional colonial history. A less fortunate outcome of this structural decision is a somewhat tedious repetition in each case of the assumptions of the book laid out in the "Introduction" and partial duplication of the conclusions formulated in the contextual Chapters 1-3. However, one can understand the dilemma of a researcher trying to present ample archival evidence without compromising the lucidity of argumentation but at the same time not prepared to shelve the gem cases he dug out and reconstructed with professional finesse. If this was indeed the author's problem, then the two-part structure seems a good way round it, even at the cost of some redundancy.

Another important achievement of David Parrish is the adoption of the cultural history approach. He shows political, religious and communicative developments never losing sight of their interrelatedness in the best anthropological style of Geertzian "thick description" (Geertz 3-30). His methodological awareness is particularly evident in Chapter 3 devoted to the circulation of the Jacobean and anti-Jacobean discourses via institutional, extra-institutional, print and oral communication channels of the time. When analyzing stories relating to Jacobitism regularly printed in colonial newspapers, he comes close to the methodological postulate of Peter Mandler that "a cultural historian must have a mental map of the *entire field of representation* in which their texts sit and must have ways of communicating this map to the reader" (97). Parrish maps his field carefully by discussing the topicalisation of Jacobitism in colonial papers, news reprints from English newspapers next to reports on local Jacobitism and printing relevant letters from the readers. He draws examples of Jacobite content from pamphlets, religious sermons and almanachs and identifies Jacobite ideas encoded in fictional and symbolic forms.

After reading this deeply researched and tightly argued book, one may have a momentary impression that Jacobitism and its opposite were the decisive factors in the development of an eighteenth-century British Atlantic culture. Of course, Parrish never claims that much, yet does his best to demonstrate "their contemporary relevance in a wider geographical context than has previously been known" (4). The effect of his work is an excellent book that can be recommended to

anyone interested in the cultural processes of Britain's emerging American empire. Apart from breaking new grounds in Jacobite Studies, the book is likely to inspire a wide range of scholars in multiple fields of eighteenth-century American history: general and local, religious, intellectual, literary, media and communication and even biography. It is unlikely to gather dust on library shelves in near future.

Works Cited

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description." *Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973. 3-30. Print.

Mandler, Peter. "The Problem with Cultural History." *Cultural and Social History* 1.1 (2004): 94-117. Print.

Monod, Paul Kleber. "A Restoration? 25 years of Jacobite Studies." *Literature Compass* 10.4 (2013): 311-330. Print.

Irmina Wawrzyczek
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

Susan Farrell. *Imagining Home: American War Fiction from Hemingway to 9/11*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2017. 223 pages.

In *Imagining Home: American War Fiction from Hemingway to 9/11* Susan Farrell aims to trace certain patterns of continuity in American war literature published between 1926 and 2007. The scholar argues that issues of war and gender have not been sufficiently addressed in the analyses of the selected iconic American writers' works. Consequently, she attempts to show "how ideas of home and the domestic specifically enter into canonical American war fiction from Hemingway up to the post-9/11 period" (8). The author, a professor of English at the College of Charleston, focuses in her research on American war literature, and has recently published critical companions to Kurt Vonnegut's and Tim O'Brien's life and work. She is also a founding member of the international Kurt Vonnegut Society. *Imagining Home* is composed of four chapters; the first three are dedicated to the works of Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Vonnegut, and Tim O'Brien, respectively, while the last one focuses on post-9/11 novels. It is true that much has been written about American First World War literature (beginning with Stanley Cooperman's now classic *World War I and the American Novel*), as well as post-Vietnam fiction and post-9/11 literature, and many separate studies have been dedicated to Hemingway, Vonnegut, and O'Brien. However, this is the first book that attempts to synthesize the American twentieth-century literary war tradition, paying special attention to gender and the verbalization of war trauma. Such a framework necessitates a selective approach and generates certain omissions, yet the author's argumentation is clear, logical, and consistent.

According to Farrell, the writers under consideration undermine gender

stereotypes, and thus blur the cliché borderline between war front and home front. As Susan Grayzel reminds us, the term home front began to be widely used during the First World War to separate the domestic sphere, associated with women, from the war zone, the core of masculine experience. Although this dichotomy is not novel, the 1914-1918 conflict "involved civilians in a way not found in any previous modern European war," therefore the idea of separate fronts was to protect the status quo and maintain social order at a moment of particularly threatening upheaval (Grayzel 11). Such a rigid distinction between the private and the public has also determined who has the right to be traumatized by war, and to tell the ensuing stories of horror. The denial of the actual interdependence of the two fronts has characterized discourses about later wars as well. By contrast, Farrell aims to demonstrate that the American writers under consideration have questioned the normative gender categories that posit women as wives/mothers, awaiting the return of the soldier at home, and men as warriors, engrossed in military matters, indifferent, or even hostile, to the lures of domesticity.

Imagining Home therefore approaches the war as a gendering activity that "draws upon pre-existing definitions of gender at the same time that it structures gender relations" (Higonnet et al. 4). In Farrell's opinion, when the writers under analysis depict the First and the Second World War, the Spanish Civil War, the Vietnam War and the post-9/11 War on Terror, they examine these conflicts from the vantage point of traditional gender expectations, yet at the same time they "imagine domestic spaces as alternatives to experiences on the front lines" (9). In the scholar's view, both Hemingway and Vonnegut construct male characters who desire to find shelter from the horrors of the front in intense domestic relationships. Breaking with Hemingway's reputation as an "ultramasculine scribe of war" (16), in her interpretation of *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Farrell demonstrates that his female characters are equally affected by war as the male ones. Analyzing *Mother Night*, *Cat's Cradle* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, she also points out that Vonnegut is particularly suspicious of the traditional gender codes that posit war as a glamorous ritual of manhood, and the domestic as the innocent, boring, feminine space. O'Brien in turn illustrates, by various means, the porousness of the home front and the war zone. Farrell reexamines his *Going After Cacciato*, *The Things They Carried* and *In the Lake of the Woods* as literary attempts to make sense of the American experience in Vietnam by referring to inherited, classical notions of virtue, bravery, and heroism. Questioning feminist interpretations that read O'Brien's portraits of women as one-dimensional sexual objects, Farrell shows how the writer undermines traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and approaches with ambivalence the stereotypical fusion of military prowess with sexual conquest. Most importantly, in this perspective, war ceases to be "a forbidden zone" for women (Tylee 251), who are directly victimized by armed conflicts, and/or are not naively believed to be protected from knowledge about war atrocities. Farrell refers to a large body of criticism, in particular a substantial corpus of academic

studies of the selected authors' works. Yet, while she acknowledges the influence of Jennifer Haytock's inspiring book *At Home, At War: Domesticity and World War One in American Literature*, the omission of Brenda M. Boyle's insightful *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives: A Critical Study of Fiction, Films and Nonfiction Writings* is a bit disappointing.

The scholar also challenges the assumption that American fiction produced after 9/11 presents an unproblematic retreat into conservative values. Commenting on a number of post-9/11 novels, Richard Gray, for example, notices that "to begin imagining what it might feel like to survive the end of the world is not entirely resistant to the seductive pieties of home, hearth and family, and, related to them, the equally seductive myth of American exceptionalism" (17). The focus on the domestic thus deflates the national and international impact of the tragic events, and turns them into mundane, heart-renting melodramas (Gray 30). Yet, in Farrell's opinion, 9/11 literature inscribes itself within a tradition of American war writing which highlights the view of war atrocities as a result of the American way of life, rather than a historical aberration. Stressing the interdependency of the domestic and the front, American writers explore the inevitable contamination of the private sphere by political lies and war violence. Jonathan Safran Foer, for instance, in his *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, fuses the Allied bombing of Dresden in 1945 with the 2001 attack on World Trade Centre "to show that there are no safe home places in the midst of war" (13). According to Farrell, Foer's novel, together with Jess Walter's *The Zero* and Don De Lillo's *Falling Man*, all challenge the heroic discourse of protective masculinity. Deeply traumatized, their protagonists "long to rebuild a home, but find it impossible to do so, winding up in liminal or in-between places. The only home places available to them are partial and contingent, the private, domestic world always threatened by the public specter of war and violence" (185). Questioning the mythology of an innocent American nation that developed around 9/11, the three writers use "the myth of the Fall to complicate popular notions of innocence and experience, ignorance and knowledge, guilt and blame" (152).

Furthermore, Farrell opposes the widely held opinion that the 9/11 crisis generated a literature different from previous American fiction in its inability to verbalize terror. In her book she aims to demonstrate that the concern with testimony has been an important issue for American war writers in the past hundred years. To prove this point, in her analyses, Farrell focuses also on the relation between representation and traumatic reality. She highlights Hemingway's fundamental suspicion of language as artifice; in her view, his characters are incapable of putting their feelings into words, for they tend to believe that verbalization distorts real experience and language "is a simulated and incomplete reality" (17). In its emphasis on the potential of war stories to create community and initiate the process of recovery from trauma, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* provides a bridge between Hemingway's earlier novels and the search for testimony, characteristic of later twentieth-century writers.

As to Vonnegut and O'Brien, they both examine, in a postmodern perspective, the relativity of truth, yet while the former radically asserts the unreliability of language, the latter asks important questions about the healing potential of the stories we tell about the trauma of war. The importance of testimony, binding the community together or further alienating the traumatized individual, is central in Foer's, Walter's and Don De Lillo's novels. The dense web of intertextual allusions Farrell discovers between the iconic writers' fiction and post-9/11 literature is most interesting and intriguing.

However, although the scholar places her interpretations in a rigorously researched historical context, she does not refer extensively to the changing cultural background, particularly the shift from a modernist aesthetics to a postmodern one, which could illuminate the difference between Hemingway's distrust of language and Vonnegut's conviction that the narratives we share constitute our reality. The author claims that postmodern novels "embrace storytelling and elevate language as a means of shaping reality rather than diminishing it" (56). Such a positive conclusion is not convincing in the light of many postmodernists' tragic assertion that language pre-exists us, that we are imprisoned in language, and thus any meanings we produce are always unstable. The ethical turn of the 1980s, together with the development of trauma studies, would also account for O'Brien's interest in storytelling, and his characters' desperate efforts to communicate war atrocities. Although the author makes use of trauma theory, she very briefly refers to the now canonical works of Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub. Her interpretations of post-9/11 fiction would definitely benefit from later theoretical works, which approach trauma as part of our ideological construction, "the root of subjectivity and social order," carefully concealed under fantasies of completeness (Edkins 132). What is more, a biopolitical perspective would help expose the manipulations of sovereign power during the War on Terror, and thus highlight to what extent "American writing of the war [is] the war" (Matthews 217).

These shortcomings do not spoil the overall effect of Farrell's study. *Imagining Home* is an interesting and engaging reading—its most innovative aspect lies in the foregrounding of the continuities between American fiction inspired by the First World War, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and the 9/11 conflict. Such a perspective offers a thought-provoking revision of classical American war novels and traditional academic categorizations. Moreover, in her study of the representation of gender in war literature Farrell shows how, by undermining traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity, American writers attempt to create, through story-telling, a sense of shared responsibility for war. *Imagining Home* thus alerts the twenty-first-century reader to the interdependence of the political and the personal, as well as the inevitable infection of the domestic by war terror.

Works Cited

Boyle, Brenda M. *Masculinity in Vietnam War Narratives: A Critical Study of Fiction, Films and Nonfiction Writings*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009. Print.

Cooperman, Stanley. *World War I and the American Novel*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967. Print.

Edkins, Jenny. "Time, Personhood, Politics." *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*. Ed. Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, Robert Eaglestone. London and New York: Routledge, 2014. 127-139. Print.

Gray, Richard. *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*. Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print.

Grayzel, Susan R. *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999. Print.

Haytock, Jennifer. *At Home, At War: Domesticity and World War One in American Literature*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003. Print.

Higonnet, Margaret Randolph, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz, eds. "Introduction." *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987. 1-17. Print.

Matthews, John T. "American Writing of the Great War." *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*. Ed. Vincent Sherry. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 217-242. Print.

Tylee, Claire M. *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64*. London: Macmillan, 1990. Print.

Anna Branach-Kallas
Nicolas Copernicus University, Toruń

Ewa Barbara Łuczak, ed. *Ernest Hemingway*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskigo, 2017. 300 pages.

The latest volume in the series *Mistrzowie Literatury Amerykańskiej* (*Masters of American Literature*) has excellent timing. A look back at the works of Ernest Hemingway seems to go against the general chronology that the editors have had us accustomed to,[1] and is not the most obvious of choices. Ewa Barbara Łuczak, the editor of this volume, in her introduction suggests that the book is published in the

---

1   Including heretofore collections on Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy, Toni Morrison, the Beat Generation, the early postmodern novelists (Barth, Barthelme, Coover) and Native American authors (Momaday, Silko, Erdrich, Alexie, Visenor), the series has been established as a major Polish resource on postwar and contemporary American writers.

spirit of literary revisionism, in the best sense of the word. Its task is clear: to remove the layers of sediment that have covered Hemingway's statue over the decades. Upon reflection, the metaphor of the statue should be taken further in the case of this volume, because the novelist who achieved a statuesque position on the literary scene during his lifetime, has been denied a single monument. Instead, through the eyes of some of the finest American literature scholars in Poland, we discover a number of different, sometimes even slightly conflicting figures of the great modernist writer. Such an approach harbors ambiguity, the air of which dominates the volume and emphasizes a quality essential to all good literature.

As Ewa Łuczak observes, the last decades have not been kind to Hemingway. A white, conspicuously heterosexual man, handsome and athletic, an American rushing to the frontlines of every significant conflict of the twentieth century, is an easy target for major critical discourses. And so Hemingway has been deemed a misogynic racist with little consideration to the fact that despite his public image (true, self-sustained, maybe even kindled), he is, undisputedly, among the leading intellectuals of his generation, and in such cases, there is no room for oversimplification. One of the volume's striking merits is that whilst challenging this both simplistic and widespread image of Hemingway, it manages to accomplish its goals avoiding entirely the jargon that is the burden of so many academic publications.

The book is well timed also because it is in step with the current trends in literary studies; a gradual departure from the up-to-recently predominant poststructuralist approach, the book positions itself close to the author and not too far from his reader. Such a perspective is pluralistic, it entices an ongoing debate to replace once-and-for-all conclusions. The good timing has also to do with the current political situation on both sides of the Atlantic, as nationalisms rise in power the contemporary intellectual is forced to do something much against his nature: to take a stand. In Hemingway, a witness of and a participant in turbulent recent history, we will find a reflection of our own anxieties, and hopefully, something beyond.

The volume's chapters are arranged with a view to two different organizational principles: chronology and the variety of aspects in Hemingway's writing as a whole. Thus we both witness the author's development and his non-coherent complexity. And so the book opens with Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich's reading of some of the earliest stories by Hemingway with the focus on the theme of death, ever present in all of his writings. Death, apart from its obvious universal dimension, ushers a typically modernist problem that has been persistently resurfacing over the past century: authenticity. This elusive goal that Hemingway set for himself, the "one true sentence" (*A Movable Feast* 11) is to the contemporary reader something to long for. Tired of poststructuralist experiments, he will find Hemingway's stories almost refreshing in their lamentation over the loss of real art in exchange for showy trickery (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich 31). The scholar argues that, in Hemingway's eyes, culture is regressing as it loses touch with its roots (31), a stunningly accurate observation considering today's circumstances.

The theme of death carries on to the second chapter of the volume, Ewa Łuczak's study of eugenic discourse in one of Hemingway's less appreciated novels, *The Torrents of Spring*. From the perspective of eugenics, the scholar is able to show the young author's position in relation to a powerful cultural phenomenon legitimizing the racism of early-twentieth century American elites. The argument is nuanced and takes into consideration both Hemingway's open opposition to notions such as racial purity and biological determinism and his belief in the superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon male (38). Similar ambiguity runs through Justyna Włodarczyk's article on *Green Hills of Africa*, which in spite of its preoccupation with the theme of hunting, does not fail to discuss Hemingway's relationship with his African guides and porters accompanying him during shooting expeditions. With much critical distance Łuczak and Włodarczyk elaborate on the possible reasons for the widespread accusations of racism, all the while keeping the reader sensitive to a certain degree of historical relativism: actions today deemed as racist, in the first half of the twentieth century would have been perceived as quite the contrary, "acts of intellectual courage… challeng[ing] well-established authority," as Ewa Łuczak observes (55).[2]

Hemingway's relationships with women, also the subject of much simplification, is depicted with a similar challenging sense of ambiguity. The issue resurfaces in the volume a number of times, but is most comprehensively approached by Anna Pochmara and Zuzanna Ładyga, the former offering a reading of *Men Without Women*, the latter discussing *The Garden of Eden*. Anna Pochmara's title ("Bohaterowie w bezruchu" ["Motionless Heroes"[3]]) suggests that the goal here is to nuance popular convictions of the writer's misogyny. The chapter convincingly demonstrates that many of the so-called "heroes" in Hemingway's fiction are weak, passive and defeated, hardly heroes at all. Pochmara emphasizes the difference between these men and the image that is often identified with Hemingway himself, implying compellingly that in this case there is more truth in the fiction than in the myth. Among the three epigrams that precede the chapter we find the famous observation from Judith Fetterley claiming that Hemingway conveys the following message to the female readers of *Farewell to Arms*: "the only good woman is a dead one"[4] (Pochmara 75), but as the scholar is quick to notice, in the light of contemporary research, such radical, and therefore widely quoted, opinions are not entirely legitimate. A well-

---

2   All translations from Polish are mine.

3   Should the text ever be translated into English, I would suggest the title "Still Heroes," as it would do a wonderful job of conveying the ambiguity that Anna Pochmara is sensitive to. I decided to translate it in an unambiguous way for the needs of the present review because the original Polish title does not allow such a playful compound of contrasting meanings.

4   Pochmara translates the quote into Polish; the original words come from Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 71.

illuminated cultural backdrop of the early-twentieth century helps her do away with a rather simplistic view on gender relations in Hemingway's work.

Zuzanna Ładyga's reading of the posthumous *Garden of Eden* reaffirms and develops this nuanced depiction of sexuality and power. In the opening sentence she argues that the novel is a "radical departure from gender stereotypes" (255), and goes on to show that the modest reception in Poland has not made it possible to confront the book's subversive nature with the popular image of the author. As opposed to the works published during Hemingway's lifetime, Ładyga argues, the novel dismisses strictly biographical readings (257), and implicitly, we could also venture to claim, it questions such readings in relation to his earlier works. The reversal of gender roles and the final bitter triumph of the man undermines the image Hemingway never ceased to cultivate. The protagonist is victorious only because the rules of the contest are created by and for men, Hemingway seems to reflect in the privacy of his study, and so the man's accomplishment is worthless.

Two authors pay significant attention to the Polish reception of Hemingway: Mirosława Buchholtz and Paweł Jędrzejko. The former scholar offers a personal and touching memory of her grandfather as an introduction to the main object of her study. Roughly Hemingway's contemporary and an avid reader of his fiction, the man having been a witness and participant of the turbulent history of the twentieth century and inspires a reflection on the various, not exclusively literary, receptions of the famous *The Old Man and the Sea* by the generations that followed. As we move away from the printed page and towards the flickering screen, we are invited to think about the changing centers of gravity in the various adaptations, and thus also interpretations of Hemingway's timeless novella. The latter scholar also includes a significant visual element in his argument: for Paweł Jędrzejko Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* serves as the backdrop for making a surprising, yet compelling comparison between Ernest Hemingway and Tadeusz Borowski. The surprise, quite obviously, comes from the fact that for Hemingway the military conflict that shaped him as an artist was World War I, for Borowski it was World War II, but soon it becomes apparent that the argument is sound: the cultural implications of the Great War in the West of Europe are much more better suited to be compared with the trauma of the Holocaust, significantly more prominent in the culture of Eastern Europe.

The significance of World War I for Hemingway's fiction is depicted by Marek Paryż in his discussion of *A Farewell to Arms*. The chapter's perverse title ("Wojna jest prosta" ["War Is Simple"]) is an excellent reflection of the novel's, and, by extension, its author's deep ambivalence about this unprecedented conflict. In fact, nothing is simple when it comes to this novel: neither the disproportion between its literary merit and its cult status, nor the incoherent protagonist that will significantly impact much of Hemingway's future prose, not to mention the fractured foundations of Western culture the book is set upon. Frederic Henry, as Marek Paryż argues, is a character, whose "identity has been reset, in the sense that his personal history cannot be reconstructed" (108), and in that he heralds the profound axiological crisis born

from the embers of the Great War. His personal alienation becomes the alienation of the Western man, and war to him is expected to bring "purification" (112). Henry's lack of an ideology is a possible reason for his estrangement, and in this he becomes a product of his times. We know exactly what he eats and drinks, but we no access to what he thinks. The lost child he fathers is not truly lost, because it is never truly his, as Paryż demonstrates, and therefore Henry's barren soul comes to stand for the condition of Western culture, and to a degree, Hemingway himself. The conclusion arrives naturally, "*A Farewell to Arms* is open to interpretations that spite the writer's presumable intentions" (123), and in that Hemingway's art becomes greater than its creator.

The chapters by Alicja Piechucka (one) and Zbigniew Maszewski (two) support this conviction. Both of Maszewski's pieces are dedicated to Hemingway's posthumous publications; the first of which is a reflection on *A Moveable Feast*, the second on *Under Kilimanjaro*. The perspective for the discussion of Hemingway's Paris memoir is set masterfully; spanning from hunger to self-discipline, it helps us to get to the predominant dichotomy that drives Hemingway's literature of that time. The tension between need and restraint that the scholar is able to distill from the anecdotes and seeming trivialities of everyday life proves to be the source of the inexhaustible energy that Hemingway's readers were always drawn to, but were could rarely pinpoint. Much praise is also due to both chapters for comparing the various editions of the discussed works, a job that is both significant and nowadays also deficient, especially since not all of the editions are available to the Polish reader. In his study of *Under Kilimanjaro*'s process of publication Zbigniew Maszewski offers us facts both obscure and important, a quality quite rare in our world of informational overload.

Alicja Piechucka's chapter functions in much the same way. The scholar presents us with a nuanced depiction of the relationship between Ernest Hemingway, and his great literary rival, William Faulkner. The point of intersection for the two literary legacies is both relevant and surprising, even to those well versed in American modernist literature: the cinematic adaptation of Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* with the script by Faulkner.[5] The argument follows then the history of the text's screen versions carefully signaling the changing perspectives in connection with the shifts in the cultural backdrop. Piechucka offers us a much appreciated insight into the gradual changes in respect to addressing and processing Hemingway's legacy, an understanding that makes us more careful in forming conclusive opinions about the author's place amongst popular politics and entertainment.

Kamil Chrzczonowicz closes the volume and in a circular motion takes us back to the beginnings of Hemingway's writing, to the times before his literary debut as he sheds light on the author's sense of humor, a rather obscure trait of his character. Almost completely absent from Hemingway's published body of works, comical

---

5   From the chapter we learn that Faulkner was formally only to co-author of the script, but as Piechucka shows, his role in the creative process was decisive. The other script writer was Jules Furthman.

elements resurface both in the letters that he left behind, and in the memories of those who knew him in person. From this account we meet Hemingway as a man with lots of critical distance to himself, which should come as a surprise to those, who associate the writer with the public image he maintained.

I have decided to leave Ewa Barbara Łuczak's reflections on *For Whom the Bell Tolls* for last, because, to my mind, they convey the spirit of the entire book, and therefore should also conclude my reading the volume. Challenging Kurt Vonnegut's claim that Hemingway is not really an American writer, but rather an expatriate disconnected from the troubles of the United States of his day (173), the scholar attempts to show who Hemingway was by showing who he was not (173). Placing the novelist face to face with the "other," Łuczak is able to show a deep ambivalence not only of his novel, but of the man himself. A reading of his perhaps most famous work leads us to a rather perverse, but well grounded conclusion: the more *For Whom the Bell Toll*'s author demonstrated a cosmopolitan curiosity of the other, the more he implicitly appeared as the man Vonnegut refused to see in him.

The argument revolves around Robert Jordan, whose cosmopolitism seems to resemble Hemingway's own, and in the heart of this character, Łuczak manages to show an arresting inconsistency between what Jordan demonstrates consciously and what he feels, to a large extent, against himself. The internal conflict, as the scholar observes, is set against in an environment of no clear divisions: be they political, religious or moral. Hemingway appears in this context as a discerning maven of 1930s Spain who with much forethought guides us through the quicksand of once-and-for-all statements. Integrity is exposed as naïve, consistency of action turns out to be utopian. His downfall is of a different sort than that of Frederick Henry in Marek Paryż's argument. However, the trajectory that takes us from Henry to Jordan seems to be the same one that guided Hemingway himself in his reactions to the atrocities of the twentieth century: from nihilistic despair to a "tragic stoicism" (Ruland and Bradbury 304), a reluctant and doomed opposition in the face of the approaching Nazism.

Ewa Barbara Łuczak concludes her argument stating that "in one's struggle against… naiveté, dogma, ethnocentrism, national and cultural divisions, the reader can find a source of intellectual satisfaction" (193), and, as I would add, a sense of unimposing guidance. In a world where dogma is on the rise, *Ernest Hemingway* matters.

Works Cited

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Moveable Feast*. New York: Scribner, 1964. Print.
Ruland, Richard, and Malcolm Bradbury. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature*. New York: Penguin, 1991. Print.

Jarosław Hetman
Nicolas Copernicus University, Toruń

Hillary L. Chute. *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016. 359 pages.

Hillary L. Chute is one of the leading scholars in the field of comics studies, renowned both for her insightful research and careful analysis of verbal-visual texts. Back in 2006, together with Marianne DeKoven, Chute edited a special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to the graphic narrative. In this way, she opened new perspectives for the study of comics and graphic novels, proving once and for all that the field of "comics studies" and comics itself should no longer only be associated with superheroes or related pop culture phenomena. Indeed, as Chute further demonstrated in her 2010 book entitled *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (Columbia University Press), contemporary comics is characterized by formal and semiotic complexity that allows it to express trauma and (family) crisis unlike any other medium. In her careful readings of the autobiographical works by contemporary female cartoonists, including Phoebe Gloeckner, Marjane Satrapi, Alison Bechdel, Lynda Barry, and Aline Kominsky-Crumb, Chute exemplified how the questions of the body, sexuality, memory, and history are represented through the interplay of words and images. Chute was also associate editor of Art Spiegelman's *MetaMaus* (Pantheon Books, 2011) and in 2014 she co-edited, together with Patrick Jagoda, a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* on comics and media, demonstrating that, although comics no longer needs to be defended as an art form in its own right, we are in need of insightful and ingenious criticism that will be able to explicate the hidden meanings behind verbal-visual tales.

Chute's 2016 book, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*, reprises the crucial aspects of her previous research in developing a complex multimedial critical framework for the study of graphic narratives. At the same time, *Disaster Drawn* also ventures into a largely uncharted territory of the rapidly developing genre of documentary, non-fiction, and historical comics. The book comprises an introduction, five chapters, and a coda, complete with numerous black-and-white and color reproductions. It should be noted that, as Chute explains in an introductory note on the figures, almost all reproduced images retain their original size. It may seem like an insignificant detail to a person outside the field but to a comics scholar this demonstrates that Chute recognizes, in her analysis, the importance of page layout and panel size, which constitute key aspects of "reading" comics that tend to be downplayed in some studies. *Disaster Drawn* encompasses a wealth of material, including the works by the legendary American cartoonists Robert Crumb and Art Spiegelman, but also the more contemporary, yet equally renowned, "founder" of comics journalism Joe Sacco, and the Japanese manga artist Keiji Nakazawa, thus extending the argument beyond the purely American context. Chute investigates what new perspectives the medium of comics opens when it comes to the representation of such historical and traumatic events as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the tragedy of the Holocaust, or the ethnic cleansing of the Yugoslav Wars.

As Chute explains in the introduction, tellingly titled "Seeing New," her interest in comics as a document and a testimony dates back to the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. In this legendary work, cats and mice enacted the real events of World War II, sparkling a controversy over the clear-cut divisions, or more precisely lack thereof, between fiction and non-fiction. The scholar observes that even today, almost thirty years after *Maus* was first published, the general public tends to be distressed at "the notion of drawing (and its intendant abstractions) as possibly 'true' or 'nonfictional'—as opposed to writing, a system of communication seen to be more transparently true or accurate" (2). For Chute, however, the subjective, creative, and often metaphorical visual language of comics, as exemplified by *Maus*, does not disqualify the form from providing a historical account. Drawing a parallel between the form of comics as a collection of frames and the role of documentary texts as evidence, Chute asserts that "in its succession of replete frames, comics calls attention to itself… as evidence" (2). In other words, through its basic grammar, comics not only shows the past but also critically challenges the very notion of history.

More specifically, Chute proposes a twofold historical argument. For one, she interprets the rise of nonfiction comics in a direct relation to World War II, claiming that documentary graphic narratives, in their unique contemporary form and format, were created as a result of the trauma triggered by the events of 1939-1945. Comics such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* or Keiji Nakazawa's *I saw It*, among other works, serve as primary examples of such a response. The second argument that Chute makes concerns the history of the form. Chute sees contemporary comics as part of a longer tradition of works that respond to the traumatic events of war and disaster, such as the seventeenth-century prints by the French artist Jacques Callot or the famous *Disasters of War* by Francisco Goya. The scholar thus asserts that graphic narratives, in their twofold documentary and critical capacity, "have the potential to be powerful precisely because they intervene against the culture of invisibility by taking… the risk of representation" (5). Chute argues that, as a medium that works with plural simultaneous images, i.e. the page that is composed of numerous smaller panels, comics provide a new way of representing trauma. Comics tackles the "unrepresentable" not through not-showing (silencing) but through visual excess and multi-perspectivity. According to Chute:

> while all media do the work of framing, comics manifests material frames—and the absences between them. It thereby literalizes on the page the work of framing and making, and also what framing excludes…. Comics offers attention to both to the creation of evidence and to what is outside the frame. It invokes visual efficacy *and* [original emphasis] limitation, creating dynamic texts inclined to express the layered horizon of history implied by 'documentary.' Stella Bruzzi suggests that documentaries are 'performative acts' and that a documentary is constituted by 'results of the collision between apparatus and subject.. The self-reflexive awareness of apparatus—drawing—is definitional to comics form. (17-18)

The forms of representation that comics, as a medium, is capable of are thus problematized in a very innovative perspective. The fact that comics is aware of mediation it involves does not constitute the key conclusion or the end point of Chute's study. The scholar takes a step further and actually *shows* the reader how through the visual style, metaphor, or format comics links ethics and vision.

Chapter One, entitled "Histories of Visual Witness," addresses in more detail the second historical claim made by Chute in relation to nonfiction comics. The scholar traces the trajectory of various nonfiction verbal-visual forms, discussing Callot, Goya, but also the works by Rembrandt and William Hogarth, and, eventually, the emergence of the professional artist-reporter in the nineteenth century. "Time, Space, and Picture Writing in Modern Comics," the second chapter in the study, maps the growth of European and American comics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on the formal and conceptual changes the form underwent during these crucial times. Chute discusses the influence of the nineteenth-century Swiss artist Rodolphe Töpffer, considered by many to be the "father of modern comics," the early-twentieth-century works of Winsor McCay, the "wordless woodcut novels" of Lynd Ward, and the illustrations by Henry Darger. She then moves on to investigate the influence of Harvey Kurtzman and his *Mad Comics*, juxtaposing the creative freedom of *Mad* with the limitations imposed by the Comics Code in the 1950s which prompted the rise of the underground comix. The two opening chapters do not really present any new findings and tend to repeat or summarize the developments already known to or discussed by other scholars in the field, especially as regards the history of comics presented in the second chapter, but they nevertheless provide a necessary theoretical and historical context for the non-specialist reader.

Indeed, it is in the final three chapters, devoted respectively to Keiji Nakazawa, Art Spiegelman, and Joe Sacco that *Disaster Drawn* truly presents its most compelling and original argument, asserting that the artists in question "invented nonfiction comics afresh" (6) in response to the world in which war became a global televised spectacle. Chute states that "a tradition of 'drawing to tell'" (6) revived by Nakazawa and Spiegelman, and later reinvented by Sacco, is meant to question and oppose the television image through its explicit testimonial (subjective, personal, and emotional) character.

Chute proposes to see the year 1972 as the key moment in the development of nonfiction comics dealing with the trauma of war. 1972 is the year in which two unique "visions" of World War II were published in the US and Japan respectively, namely Spiegelman's *Maus* and Nakazawa's *I Saw It: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima*. *Maus* constitutes a second-hand account, with Art Spiegelman relating the story of his father Vladek during the Holocaust, while *I Saw It* is essentially an eyewitness account of the destruction of Hiroshima in 1945. Different when it comes to witness status, yet related in their innovative pursuits, both titles mark for Chute a new era in the history of documentary comics. *Maus* and *I Saw It* dare to address the inexpressible, the traumatic, and the larger-than-life by means of a medium that had

been associated primarily with popular culture, adventure, or superheroes. As such, both works redefined comics and what it is capable of addressing and expressing for the next generations. Chute shows in her analysis that the works of Spiegelman and Nakazawa not only document but also visualize the trauma through unique visual idioms. Spiegelman famously adopts the animal metaphor in which Jews are presented as mice, Nazis as cats, Poles as pigs, and Americans as dogs etc. Nakazawa, in his own right, draws on the rich visual tradition of manga with its grotesque, "exaggerated," and sometimes even caricatured features. The real is thus juxtaposed with the drawn that does not purport to be "transparent." On the contrary, the (hand) drawn manifests its own artificiality. As Chute observes, "*I Saw It* and *Maus* are both narratives of terror that devolve on *images* [original emphasis original] of terror…. Motivated by the urgencies of re-visioning and re-seeing the war, comics sought to defamiliarize received images of history, and also to communicate, to circulate in the realms of the popular" (142).

The final chapter in the study is devoted to Joe Sacco and "comics journalism," a unique form of dealing with traumatic past and present. The name comics journalism does not only bring together the spheres of reporting and drawing, or drawing-as-reporting, but is also meant to emphasize the fact that this hybrid form is concurrently self-reflexive and documentary in character. As such, comics journalism is supposed to constitute a new whole that is something greater than just the sum of its parts. Comics journalism inspires reflexivity because, as Chute observes, drawing is never transparent and always conveys the mark of the artist. This open rejection of transparency and objectivity, in turn, gives rise to questions about history's discursive and constructed character. According to Chute, "[t]he medium of comics is always already self-conscious as an interpretative, and never purely mimetic, medium. Yet, this self-consciousness, crucially, exists together with the medium's confidence in its ability to traffic in expressing history" (198). The power of comics, Chute observes, lies in their ability to create "visual and verbal counter-archives to official histories" (205).

Sacco's non-fiction works, including *Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-1995* (2000), *The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo* (2003), *Palestine* (1992-1995), and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), are then analyzed in more detail. Interestingly enough, Chute chooses not to discuss Sacco's most recent publication, *The Great War* (2013), devoted to The Battle of the Somme which took place during World War I, though she briefly mentions it in the introductory part of Chapter Five. This omission is notable yet understandable when one takes into account the context of comics journalism emphasized by Chute at the beginning of the chapter. Besides, the thoroughness and insightfulness of Chute's analysis of her selected corpus more than makes up for this loss. The scholar examines all aspects of Sacco's visual idiom, including composition, aesthetics, color, and even the character of lines, which, in the field where many critics come from a purely literary background and often tend to focus more on the plot and less on the form and visual style of the comic book, is

something worthy of praise. The attention to detail also constitutes a meta-comment on the ethical, and not only aesthetical, character of Sacco's comics journalism. According to Chute, "the slowness of Sacco's comics [i.e. their visual density and saturation with details – M.O.] is both a mode of ethical awareness and an implicit critique of superficial news coverage" (201). This involvement in the story of others, made visible in its careful and meticulous visualization, constitutes the characteristic feature of Sacco's works.

It is thanks to such innovative contextualization, paired with attention to detail and visual erudition, that Chute's study impresses and does not simply repeat what has already been said on Sacco and his work in previous studies, such as *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World* (2015) edited by Daniel Worden. Indeed, Chute employs an arsenal of theoretical tools, referencing Nicholas Mirzoeff, Edward Said, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Shoshana Felman, John Berger, and W.J.T. Mitchell, yet never in her analysis does she succumb to chaos or creates just a collage of quotations. On the contrary, Chute presents her own original view of Sacco's work, emphasizing that "graphic narratives make the roiling lines of history readable" (233), and she does so always in reference to concrete visual material that she illuminates for the reader in her careful investigation.

Disaster Drawn ends with a brief ten-page coda in which Chute comments on the contemporary issues the world of comics faces right now. As could be expected in view of recent events, the scholar addresses the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and other responses to visual representations of Islam, emphasizing the power of hand-drawn images in the era of digital recording. Chute also briefly comments on such innovative documentary graphic forms as Ari Folman's animation *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), devoted to the 1982 Lebanon War, or Phoebe Gloeckner's ongoing project *The Return of Maldoror,* in which the artist documents the murders of young women in the Mexican city of Ciudad Juárez, asserting that "the comics medium has evolved as an instrument for commenting on and re-visioning experience and history" (265). Interesting as these examples are, they nevertheless leave the reader athirst for more detailed descriptions, especially in view of the fact that careful analysis constitutes the study's main strength.

This notwithstanding, *Disaster Drawn* is one of the first and certainly most insightful studies to contextualize and theorize non-fiction graphic narratives. Documentary and/or war-related comics are, on the one hand, viewed as part of a longer tradition of war prints, pamphlets, and caricatures, and, on the other, the form is analyzed in relation to the specificity of the medium. Chute's study is truly an engaging, enlightening and enjoyable read.

Works Cited

Chute, Hillary. *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Print.

Chute, Hillary, and Marianne DeKoven, eds. *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.4, Special
    Issue on "Graphic Narratives" (2006). Print.

Chute, Hillary, and Patrick Jagoda, eds. *Critical Inquiry* 40.3, Special Issue on "Comics
    & Media" (2014). Print.

Spiegelman, Art. *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus*. New York:
    Pantheon, 2011. Print.

Worden, Daniel. ed. *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World.* Jackson:
    The University Press of Mississippi, 2015. Print.

Małgorzata Olsza
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Klaus Lösch, Heike Paul and Meike Zwingenberger, eds. *Critical Regionalism*. Publications of the Bavarian American Academy, Volume 18. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016. 216 pages.

Critical regionalism is a productive, relatively new method of analysis enacted in many areas of research, from architecture through cultural and social studies to art and literature. The concept of critical regionalism was introduced to the field of architecture by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis in 1981. In 1983, it was taken up by geographer Kenneth Frampton, who, in his influential essay "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," called for creating a (third) space in architecture where the universal (modernity, technology, civilization) is in dialogue with the local (the idiosyncratic, the particular) producing a new, enhanced experience of the world and hopefully "a resistant, identity-giving culture" (Frampton). Bringing the concept to the field of regional studies, Neil Campbell, in *The Rhizomatic West* (2008), applies it to the American West and postulates a redefinition of the region by looking at it not as an insulated, mythic, nation-consolidating, static and sentimental construct but as a vibrant, multi-faceted, "uncontained, problematic, contradictory… fluid, imaginative, transnational, global" (44-45) inclusive space. A similar, revisionist kind of regionalism is proposed with reference to Appalachia in Douglas Reichert Powell's *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape* (2007), where the author employs the methodology to search for ways to conceive of what is particular and local as implicated in a wider web of politics, culture and history. The publication of the Bavarian American Academy further illuminates the concept and dialogic character of critical regionalism as employed to a wide spectrum of areas of study.

Edited by Klaus Lösch, Heike Paul and Meike Zwingenberger, the volume *Critical Regionalism* is a collection of ten essays, which originated as key-note presentations and student papers from the Bavarian American Academy's Summer Schools of 2013, 2014 and 2015. The collection opens with an introduction by editors

Klaus Lösch and Heike Paul, who provide a short genealogy of critical regionalism as concept and method, then elaborate on its agenda placing it within the "more recent revisionist regionalist scholarship" (4). Interestingly, they self-consciously underscore that the Bavarian American Academy, seated in regional Germany and conducting a transatlantic, transnational dialogue, is itself a perfect epitome of a contact zone in the critical regionalist mode (7). The list of contributors to *Critical Regionalism* includes Tanja N. Aho, Birgit M. Bauridl, Carmen Brosig, Katharina Gerund, Cheryl Temple Herr, Amy Doherty Mohr, Miles Orvell, Rachael Price, Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Silvia Spitta. They apply the critical regionalist lens to a diverse array of cultural, historical, political, social and literary analyses.

In the first essay of the collection, Cheryl Temple Herr carries out a critical regionalist reading of James Fenimore Cooper's *Oak Openings* and Gene Stratton-Porter's *The Keeper of the Bees* with special focus on the conceptions of nature that appear in the two novels, as well as on bee hunting and keeping practices as they evolved into the present migratory bee keeping industry. Adopting an ecocritical stance, the author conducts a fascinating analysis of the ways humans (indigenous Americans) and non-human others have negotiated and built their environment long before European settlers arrived. Herr indicates that doing so is an act of intricate ecopoetics derived from an intimate acquaintance with immediate surroundings and dialogue, very much reminiscent of the critical regionalist plea articulated for architecture, which opposes universalizing, commercial and exploitative treatment of places.

Just like a comparative study of nineteenth-century historical romances may, according to Herr, reveal subsequent stages of bee keeping culture development across regions in the United States with accompanying factors impacting change, it is also possible to analyze ruins of previously purposeful structures to expose the various forces leading up to their decrepitude. Through analyzing the depiction of ruins in nineteenth-century American painting and twentieth- and twenty-first-century photography, Miles Orvell, in his essay, traces changes in the conceptions of civilization in relation to nature as they evolved into contemporary uncanny fascination with the destructive force of natural disasters.

Critical regionalism proves a creative tool of analysis when rethinking the region not as subordinated to and part of a nation-state made up of various localities that add up, so to speak, to the definition of national identity sealed within its borders. Two essays in the volume discuss the border and borderlands arguing for a change in perspective to a transnational one. Whereas Claudia Sadowski-Smith focuses on US-American borders with Canada and Mexico, Silvia Spitta zooms in on Tijuana and San Diego. Both aim to transform the perception of borders not as impermeable lines along which division, separation and exclusion takes place, but as spaces that are home to dialogic imagination, connection, multilingualism and transculturation. An emblematic example and embodiment of such a perspective is the Toy an-Horse, a wooden installation put up at the border crossing between United States and Mexico by artist ERRE Marcos Ramírez. The installation closely resembles the Trojan horse,

with two heads facing in opposite directions, reminiscent of the Roman god Janus. The work of art not only establishes dialogue between US-American and Mexican cultures but also connects the whole continent to ancient European mythologies.

Expanding the connection even further across the globe, Carmen Brosig makes a claim for a transnational region of solidarity between Chicano nationalist activists and Vietnamese guerillas ideologically united in the struggle against US American colonialism. Whereas the three essays mentioned above connect places physically within the conventional borders of the United States with places outside of them, the essay by Birgit M. Bauridl discusses a unique region situated altogether outside the US, namely in Bavaria, Germany. The connection with the United States is that Grafenwoehr has been a US military training area for over one hundred years. The essay looks closely at the region's singular local transnational character molded over the years by American soldiers with their families and German population alike. It examines in fascinating detail (enhanced by photography) how various diachronic and synchronic processes of cultural exchange have formed this culturally multi-layered terrain nicknamed by Germans and Americans "Graf."

The architects and the geographer who initially formulated the critical regionalist approach, together with its later advocates in other disciplines than architecture, underscore the particularities of local space as vital in constructing built environment that encompasses a multifarious array of cultural texts and human activity. Accordingly, the volume *Critical Regionalism* includes, apart from the areas of research already mentioned, critical regionalist analyses pertaining to a few other fields, namely feminist activism, literature and television. The essay by Katharina Gerund offers a discussion of second wave feminism as defined by its suspension between the global and the local, focusing on two figures: Betty Friedan and Robin Morgan. It also indicates pathways for further critical regionalist readings of feminist activism considering how the specifics of locality resonate with more global forces and trends.

The French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard, in his *Poetics of Space*, formulates a claim that we are composed of the domestic spaces we have been brought up in and, conversely, we impact and create our immediate surroundings in a lifelong, perpetual exchange, as if spinning out the thread we have been sewn with back to the outside world. The environment one constructs thus becomes a domestic space for another. I find this idea very much in accord with the critical regionalist approach, where the accent is so strongly put on the unique local—be it a special slant of light, a topography or a cultural habitus, remaining in dialogue with universalizing and modernizing tendencies. But at the same time, the boundaries between the local and the global blur and converge as the global becomes a function of the domestic spun out by multitudinous participants. In the essay on Willa Cather's *One of Ours*, Amy Doherty Mohr finds exactly such a connection between the protagonist's domestic spaces in Nebraska and the war in Europe: the destructive character of Claude Wheeler's familial and marital homes is mirrored in the violence of continental war. Similarly, the personal relationships in Larry McMurtry's *The Last*

Picture Show, insightfully analyzed in the essay by Rachael Price, are as barren and exploitative as the landscape of Texas excessively drained for oil by global forces of capital and modernization. What's domestic is implicated in a larger web of politics, culture and history.

In looking for ways in which the academic project and methodology of critical regionalism could become more of a practice and bring about material change in geographically and culturally marginalized places, Douglas Reichert Powell calls for a pedagogy enacted at institutions of higher learning on the one hand, and dialogue between local participants of culture and intellectual elites on the other. Answering this call, in her article on the reality television show *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, Tanja N. Aho, drawing on the concept of "low theory," uses online viewer responses to the series with an aim to "complicate academic approaches to representations of regionalism" (195) and expose readings that potentially participate in hegemonic discourses although apparently wishing to avoid them.

It seems that critical regionalism with its organic, "from the ground up" (Reichert Powell 26) approach proposes a fresh aesthetics of inclusion, interconnectedness, dialogue and exchange. Just like for fellow academics in Bavaria, who have put together this insightful and inspiring volume, the method appears to be significantly relevant also for scholars in American studies in Poland, as it opens a new perspective of looking at the United States by acknowledging the particulars of our own placedness. As scholars doing research on the culture, history and literature of a distant land from our own singular locality in Europe, we not only constitute a contact zone similar to the Bavarian American Academy's, but also have the opportunity to participate in a transnational multilingual conversation, and contribute our own vision imbued with the idiosyncriasies of our own place.

Works Cited

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994. Print.

Campbell, Neil. *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age*. Lincoln: Universtiy of Nebraska Press, 2008. Print.

Frampton, Kenneth. "Toward a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983. 16-30. Print.

Reichert Powell, Douglas. *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. Print.

Elżbieta Horodyska
University of Warsaw

CONTRIBUTORS

Paulina Ambroży is Associate Professor and Head of the American Literature Department at the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. She has published articles on American poetry and prose and is the author of *(Un)concealing the Hedgehog: Modernist American Poets and Contemporary Critical Theories* (2012), which approaches American modernist poetry through contemporary critical theories. The book received the 2014 American Studies Network Book Prize for remarkable research in American studies. She has been a Fulbright fellow twice: at Stanford University (2002-2003) and at the University of Chicago (2014). Her research interests include modernist and contemporary American poetry, nineteenth-century American literature, word-image relations, intermedial studies and literary theory. Currently, she is working on an intermedial project *Turn of the Sign: Crisis of Representation in American Poetry and the Visual Arts.* [apaulina@wa.amu.edu.pl]

Ewa Antoszek is Assistant Professor at the Department of American Literature and Culture, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland. Her interests include American ethnic literatures with a particular focus on Mexican-American and African-American writers, women's studies and representations of space(s) in literature. She is the author of *Out of the Margins: Identity Formation in Contemporary Chicana Writings* (2012) and several articles analyzing issues related to the situation of ethnic minorities in the U.S. She is also the co-editor of *Inne Bębny: różnica i niezgoda w literaturze i kulturze amerykańskiej* (*Different Drums: Difference and Dissent in American Literature and Culture*; 2013). Her current research examines Latina authors and artists in the U.S. who (re)write the border. [antoszek@umcs.edu.pl]

Tomasz Basiuk authored monographs on William Gaddis (*Wielki Gaddis. Realista postmodernistyczny*, 2003) and on contemporary gay men's life writing (*Exposures: American Gay Men's Life Writing since Stonewall*, 2013). He has published articles and book chapters in American Studies and queer studies, and edited or co-edited four collected volumes and a special journal issue. He co-edits the queer studies e-journal *InteraAlia*, which he co-founded in 2006, and edits a book series in American studies with Peter Lang. He guest lectured at universities in Europe and in the United States. He was recipient of a Fulbright grant and of other fellowships. He is currently principal investigator in a HERA-funded research project on queer sexual cultures in the 1970s (CRUSEV). He serves as president of the Polish Association for American

Studies and as director of the University of Warsaw Institute of the Americas and Europe. [tomek.basiuk@gmail.com]

Michał Choiński is Assistant Professor in the Institute of English Studies at the Jagiellonian University. His research focuses on the American colonial preaching tradition and on hyperbolic figuration in the literature of the U.S. South. He pursues both these topics as part of two OPUS grants funded by the Polish National Science Center. His monograph *Rhetoric of the Revival: The Language of the Great Awakening Preachers* (2016) was published by the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University. [michal.choinski@uj.edu.pl]

Agnieszka Graff is Associate Professor at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw, where she teaches U.S. culture, literature and film, African American studies and gender studies. She has authored five books of feminist essays in Polish: *Świat bez kobiet* (*World without Women*, 2001); *Rykoszetem* (*Stray Bullets*: *Gender, Sexuality and Nation*, 2008), *Magma* (*The Quagmire Effect,* 2010), *Matka Feministka* (*Mother and Feminist,* 2014), *Memy i Graffy* with Marta Frej (*Memes and Graffs*, 2015). Her articles on gender in Polish and American culture have appeared in collected volumes and academic journals including *Public Culture* and *Feminist Studies.* Her article on transnational anti-genderism, co-written with Elżbieta Korolczuk, will be published in *Signs* in spring 2018; she is currently co-editing an issue of *Signs* on gender and the global right. [abgraff2@gmail.com]

Elżbieta Horodyska is a doctoral student at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw. Her doctoral project will focus on the analysis of a selection of prose works by Jim Harrison from the perspective of critical regionalism. [e.horodyska@student.uw.edu.pl]

Ludmiła Janion is a teacher at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw and a Ph.D. candidate at the Faculty of Artes Liberales, University of Warsaw. Her research interests include gender, sexuality, and media studies. In 2016, she was a recipient of the annual Yale LGBT Studies Research Fellowship. [l.janion@gmail.com]

Karolina Korycka is a doctoral student at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw. Her thesis will focus on the problem of otherness in Henry David Thoreau's writing. [karolinakorycka@student.uw.edu.pl]

Karolina Krasuska is Assistant Professor at the American Studies Center, University of Warsaw and a member of the research group "Literature and Gender" at the Institute for Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences. She is the author of a monograph examining modernist poetry form a transnational, gender-oriented

perspective *Płeć i naród: translokacje* (*Gender and Nation: Translocations*, 2012), and co-editor and co-author of the pioneering *Encyklopedia gender* (2014). She is also the Polish translator of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (*Uwikłani w płeć*, 2008). Her newest publication is a co-edited volume (with Andrea Peto and Louse Hecht) *Women and the Holocaust: New Perspectives and Challenges* (2015). Currently, she is working on a project on gendered modes of twenty-first-century Jewish-American fiction. [karolinakrasuska@op.pl]

Rob Kroes is Professor of American Studies, Emeritus, University of Amsterdam and Honorary Professor of American Studies at the Universities of Utrecht and Ghent. He is a past president of the European Association for American Studies (1992-1996). Among his recent publications are *Buffalo Bill in Bologna* (2006), *Photographic Memories* (2007), *Prison Area, Independence Valley: American Paradoxes in Political Life and Popular Culture* (2015). [r.kroes@uva.nl]

Paweł Marcinkiewicz is Associate Professor and Head of Department of Translation Studies and Lexicography at the Institute of English Studies, University of Opole, Poland. His interests focus on American poetry and translation theory, and he is also a poet and translator. Recently he has published a monograph on John Ashbery's poetry in Polish *"Oni przybyli, żeby wysadzić Amerykę." John Ashbery i dwudziestowieczne awangardy amerykańskie* (2015). In 2014, the New York publishing house Spuyten Duyvil printed his selected poems *The Day He's Gone*, translated into English by Piotr Florczyk. [pmarcinkiewicz@uni.opole.pl]

Zbigniew Maszewski teaches at the Department of American Literature at the University of Łódź. In 1994-1995 he held the American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship with affiliation at Harvard University. In 2003 he published *William Faulkner and Bruno Schulz: A Comparative Study*. His special areas of interest are America Romanticism and American and European literatures of the 1920s and 1930s. He has recently published articles on the American Southwest as well on Ernest Hemingway's letters and his novel *Under Kilimanjaro*.
[z.maszewski@yahoo.com]

Anna Pochmara is Assistant Professor at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw. She was a Fulbright fellow at Yale University. Her Ph.D. dissertation manuscript was mentioned as the runner-up in up in the 2009 Rob Kroes Publication Award competition organized by the European Association for American Studies. She has served as co-editor of *Acta Philologica*, the journal of the Faculty of Modern Languages, University of Warsaw. She is the author of over twenty articles and reviews in the field of American studies and of *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality* (2011), for which she received the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education Award. Her current research project

concerns the uses of temperance and intemperance in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century African American literature. [ania.pochmara@gmail.com]

Tadeusz Rachwał is Professor of English at the University of Humanities and Social Sciences in Warsaw. His books and academic papers address various issues of colonial and postcolonial studies, contemporary literary and critical theory, sociology of literature, and anthropology. His most recent publication is a monographic study of the ideas of property and loss, and their aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical significance in contemporary theoretical approaches to projects of social and political change (*Precarity and Loss: On Certain and Uncertain Properties of Life and Work*, 2017). [trachwal@swps.edu.pl]

Elżbieta Rokosz-Piejko is Associate Professor at the Institute of English Studies, University of Rzeszów, Poland. Her main academic interests focus on ethnic American autobiography and the adaptation of literary texts into audio-visual media. Her book publications include *Televised Classics: The British Classic Serial as a Distinctive Form of Literary Adaptation* (2016), *Hyphenated Identities: The Issue of Cultural Identity in Selected Ethnic American Autobiographical Texts* (2011) and *The Highlights of American Literature* (with Barbara Niedziela, 2012). [erokosz@yahoo.com]

Piotr Skurowski is Chair of the Department of English at SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, where he has also served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. His main professional interests lie in the area of U.S. cultural history and cultural studies. His publications include monographs on Henry Adams and on the image of Europe in American Progressivism. [pskurows@swps.edu.pl]

Klara Szmańko specializes in American ethnic literature, in particular African American and Asian American. Her publications address such problems as whiteness, invisibility, visibility, visual dynamics, the juxtaposition of ideology and aesthetics, color imagery, power dynamics, transformational identity politics, multiculturalism, representation of space, mimicry, nationalism and gender relations. She is also the author of *Invisibility in African American and Asian American Literature: A Comparative Study* (2008) and *Visions of Whiteness in Selected Works of Asian American Literature* (2015). She is Associate Professor at the Department of American Literature and Culture, Institute of English Studies, University of Opole. [klarka@op.pl]

Grzegorz Welizarowicz is Assistant Professor at the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Gdańsk, Poland. His research interests include Chicano/a, American Indian and African American culture, history and myths of California and U.S.-Mexican borderlands, decolonial theory, American religions, genocide studies, American theater, performance and music, race and ethnic relations, American

landscapes and soundscapes, media studies, epistemology. He has been a recipient of two Fulbright Fellowships (2000, 2012). He has presented papers at conferences in Poland, Romania, Cuba, England, Spain and delivered lectures at universities in the United States (UC Santa Barbara, Cal State Fresno).
[grzegorz.welizarowicz@ug.edu.pl]

Florian Zappe is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the Georg-August-University in Göttingen (Germany). He is the author of books on William S. Burroughs (*"Control Machines" und "Dispositive"—Eine foucaultsche Analyse der Machtstrukturen im Romanwerk von William S. Burroughs zwischen 1959 und 1968*, 2008) and Kathy Acker (*Das Zwischen schreiben—Transgression und avantgardistisches Erbe bei Kathy Acker*, 2013) as well as the co-editor (with Andrew S. Gross) of the volume *Surveillance/Society/Culture* (forthcoming 2018). His research interests range from the theory and history of the avant-garde, critical and "French" theory, pop(ular) culture, the history of European and American cinema (with a focus on independent and experimental film), modern and postmodern literature to surveillance practices and their effects on our culture. Currently, he is working on a book project on the cultural history of atheism in America. [florian.zappe@phil.uni-goettingen.de]

9 771733 915008

www.paas.org.pl