

# Guest Editors' Editorial

In 2017, the Austrian Association for American Studies (AAAS) met for its annual conference at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, forty-four years after it had been founded there in 1974 and seventy years after the first Salzburg Seminar had been held at the same place. The “Schloss,” as the present site of the Salzburg Global Seminar is lovingly called, was the setting of many of the past conferences of the association and is intricately connected with the founding and development of the field of American Studies in Austria and Europe. The conference topic, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? The Changing Nature of American Studies,” was meant to open up a dialogue about the temporal dimensions of American studies as a discipline, from the past to the present and the possible futures. Sixty-five speakers from nine countries, among them four invited keynote speakers and sixteen graduate students, met in the spirit of collegiality that the Seminar has become famous for. This inaugural volume of a new journal issued by the AAAS will demonstrate that the conference yielded productive and interesting insights into the nature of American studies.

In 1947, ninety-seven students from eighteen different countries met at the lakeside Schloss to “provide an opportunity in post-war Europe for a meeting of scholars and students from various countries in a common project of free investigation and discussion,” to quote from the 1947 mission statement.<sup>1</sup> Participants in the first seminar for American studies stayed at Schloss Leopoldskron, once owned by Max Reinhardt, the Austrian-born American theater and film director. They shared rooms and meals during intensive weeks of lectures and discussions with some of America’s most talented scholars (including literary critics F. O. Matthiessen and Alfred Kazin and anthropologist Margaret Mead). For them, and many who followed, it was a life-changing experience. For some, it still is.

The baroque-rococo building has a long history, which added to our meeting, as it had done before, an atmosphere of awe paired with a sense of privilege. Since the buildings are surrounded by a garden and face a lake that is known in popular culture as one location of *The Sound of Music* film (1965) and since the food was served in the amazing dining hall, conference participants were allowed to feel an all-inclusive sense of collegiality, which can be called the specific Leopoldskron feeling, which fostered conversations both private and academic, both friendly and confrontational. As Mark Reinhardt noted in his speech, which was delivered in the impressive Great Hall, the rococo setting made the joke he used as the starting

point for his talk more poignant because its offensiveness carried the specific historical weight of the Reinhardt family's past. And Ralph Poole, who explored F. O. Matthiessen's contribution to the first 1947 session, mentioned that Matthiessen's opening speech was a perfect fit for a meeting of a group of people coming from formerly enemy countries in a war-torn city. Images of incongruity rather than of coherence dominated the space seventy years ago. Mark Reinhardt's family connections, the ghosts and specters of Jewish history both past and present, can and should be seen together with Matthiessen's sense of being captured in the "mood of spatiotemporal misfit" that Poole addressed in his lecture. In the third keynote lecture, Philip McGowan, the current President of the European Association of American Studies, an organization that was founded at Schloss Leopoldskron in 1954, discussed two poems written immediately after the Second World War that examine the "themes of suffering, innocence, and experience" and address the ideas of apocalypse and dislocation which resulted from the ruptures of the war. In his contribution to this issue, McGowan reads Wallace Stevens's "Esthétique du Mal" and Elizabeth Bishop's "At the Fishhouses," both published in 1947, in connection with the numerous sites of contention and rupture that are associated with Schloss Leopoldskron and the history it represents.

McGowan's thoughts about the future of American studies establish a connection between the field as it started in 1947 and how it developed over the years: "It has been, and must remain, at the forefront of discussions of gender, race and identity politics. It must continue to investigate the transgressive as insistently as it does the transnational, to argue for space and recognition for transgender people just as it voices the transhistorical and reverberating concerns produced by the American project." And why should talks about the future of American studies, as Julia Leyda contended in the fourth keynote lecture, not be more knowledgeable about the "affective turn in American studies," when they come in a building that is filled with emotions to the brim? Leyda's insistence that the future of American studies will have to investigate the field of intersectional feminism even makes her perpetuate the martial image that defined the opening moments of the Salzburg Seminar when she claims that practitioners of the field need to "deploy the full armory of intersectional feminist rhetoric" in her contribution to this issue.

Leyda's invitation and the general call for contributions about the futures of American studies were taken up by many of the speakers at the conference, some of whose scholarly answers are presented in this issue. Philipp Reisner's essay on religious imagery in Cold War poetry expands American studies' recent intersectional turn to argue that authors we might normally read for "minority" or "ethnic" themes, such as Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, and Kathleen Ossip, might be more usefully read in light of Western Christianity's influence on their thought and

work. Situating these poets in a specific socio-political (and internationally political) time frame allows Reisner to explore how US-Protestant Christianity responded to the issues of the period through minority voices. Maria Proitsaki provides a more practical guide to encouraging students situated in a European culture, perhaps distant from American social and cultural minority topics, to take an interest in the work of African American poets. Her essay offers several suggestions for helping European American studies students map their own personal experiences onto those whose lives may be quite different from their own materially and culturally, yet perhaps more similar than one might imagine, in terms of personal experience. Her work is a passionate plea for us, as Americanists in a time of rapidly expanding interest in new media and video, to continue our dedication to what was perhaps early American studies' primary focus: poetry as a gateway to understanding the American experience, in all the many forms it takes.

The editors of the *Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* hope that short-form contributions will have an important place in the journal's exploration of new topics and ground-breaking research in the years to come. Nassim Balestrini and Silvia Schiltermandl open this anticipated tradition with their co-edited forum, which explores life writing studies' place in American studies. In an elegant introduction to the field, followed by short essays by Volker Depkat, Klaus Rieser, Katharina Fackler, and Schiltermandl and Balestrini themselves, they lay out the state of the field and indicate suggestions for its future development as an important element in our understanding of American history, literature, and social networks. Arguing for the development of a well-grounded methodology at the intersection of these fields, their contributions, in their own words, use "the double perspective of these fields in order to navigate the affordances of life narratives that range from being locally, regionally, or nationally rooted to those implying a transnational, transoceanic, or even global reach," bringing both a transnational and a generically intersectional American studies into focus.

Our conference about the past and the future of American studies took its title from the famous Joyce Carol Oates short story, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" Joshua Parker invited Joyce Carol Oates to the conference and she replied, saying that she had too many obligations to come. But she later sent a statement which makes sense when you recall her story about a situation getting out of control when a fifteen-year-old girl has a nightmare encounter with a seductive and dangerous man called Arnold Friend, who is considerably older than he appears to be. One way of reading this story is to say that it reflects the inability to recognize evil in its most banal forms. So this is what Oates had to say:

Often in literature, it seems that an image, a parable, the very atmosphere communicated by a text, is in some way prescient, premonitory. It is astonishing to me to realize that the America of “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” seems so contemporary, as if its implicit meanings, its latent threats, have taken firmer shape and become embodied in the years following its publication. Serial killers, mass murderers, distrust between generations, violence against women and girls—all seem to have horrifically effloresced in the years after Arnold Friend. (We even have a malevolent clown American president who wears makeup and has bleached and styled his hair in a bizarre fashion, to emulate a synthetic youth, and to deceive the vulnerable who yearn to be deceived.)<sup>2</sup>

Oates’s story, like so much American literature, comes with a history of its own. Oates dedicated the story to Bob Dylan after she had heard him sing the song “It’s all over now, Baby Blue” (1965), which contains the following lines:

Forget the dead you’ve left, they will not follow you  
 The vagabond who’s rapping at your door  
 Is standing in the clothes that you once wore  
 Strike another match, go start anew  
 And it’s all over now, Baby Blue<sup>3</sup>

As we were organizing the conference, Bob Dylan became the first song writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Especially when you read the essays by Reinhardt and Poole next to each other, every reader will be more than aware that you cannot leave the dead behind and that, even if you strike another match and start anew, the new is always part of the old in the same way that a historic building carries the legacy of the past.

As this inaugural volume of JAAAS demonstrates, scholars have explored the Salzburg Seminar in detail, but there are still many stories that need to be told. For example, in 1951, the “General session in American Studies” (from July 17 to August 30) was attended by white faculty member and historian Henry Steele Commager, who co-authored *The Growth of the American Republic* with Samuel Eliot Morison. This book was first published in 1930 and met with quite some criticism because of its treatment of African American history. At the Schloss, he met Black historian John Hope Franklin, author of *From Slavery to Freedom*, first published in 1947. When Franklin was invited to read a paper at the Southern Historical Association convention in 1949, there were objections to the invitation and questions where he would sleep and who would participate with him. Two years later in Salzburg, he and Commager co-taught a seminar and spent many hours together, occasionally with both of their families. Although this one example cannot claim that the European setting was less racist than the American, it does make a case for this spirit of “free investigation and discussion” that many conference participants and faculty



members have noted. Scholars and students from many countries have felt—and still feel—a sense of privilege when they become part of this spirit.

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## Notes

- 1 “Salzburg Seminar in American Civilization,” *Salzburg Global Seminar*, accessed on August 2, 2017, [https://www.salzburgglobal.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Documents/1947-1949/1947/Session\\_1/Session\\_1\\_-\\_001.pdf](https://www.salzburgglobal.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Documents/1947-1949/1947/Session_1/Session_1_-_001.pdf).
- 2 Joyce Carol Oates, email message to Joshua Parker, September 25, 2017. Quoted with the permission of Joyce Carol Oates.
- 3 Bob Dylan, “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” *Bringing It All Back Home* (New York: Columbia Records, 1965).