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About

The Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies (*JAAAS*) is a peer-reviewed gold open-access journal which provides an interdisciplinary space for discussions about all aspects of American studies. The journal functions as a forum for Americanists in Austria and the global academic community. Published twice a year, the journal welcomes submissions on a wide range of topics, aiming to broaden the multi- and interdisciplinary study of American cultures.

Aims

Interrogating the notion of "America" and looking at the U.S. within its transnational and (trans-)hemispheric interconnections, *JAAAS* seeks to challenge disciplinary boundaries by bringing together original and innovative work by scholars who focus on topics as diverse as literature, cultural studies, film and new media, visual arts, ethnic studies, indigenous studies, performance studies, queer studies, border studies, mobility studies, age studies, game studies, and animal studies. Apart from offering insights into trans- and international American literary and cultural studies and offering European perspectives on America, the journal also solicits scholarship that deals with history, music, politics, geography, ecocriticism, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, law, and any other aspect of American culture and society.

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Inaugural Issue
The Salzburg Seminar and Its Legacies in American Studies

Edited by **Hanna Wallinger** and **Joshua Parker**

Invited Articles

Research Articles

Forum
Life Writing and American Studies

Edited by **Nassim W. Balestrini** and **Silvia Schultermandl**

Reviews

Editorial

In the first issue of *Textual Practice*, Terence Hawkes claimed, "It is never a good time to start a new journal." As a Shakespeare scholar, he specifically lamented—but also critiqued—the situation in the arts and humanities. He diagnosed, "The Humanities . . . feel marginalized and underfunded" and "sense themselves to be hopelessly at odds with a culture which has long abandoned any recognition of the value of their role."[1] To be sure, Hawkes's emphasis on the lack of "recognition of the value of" the humanities has a nostalgic ring to it; however, as soon as one has peeled away that layer (and has overcome the initial outbursts of agreement and attendant claims that the humanities should—or must—matter), there are some points Hawkes raises that still ring very true today, more than thirty years later.

Addressing the three main points Hawkes mentioned in his editorial in reverse order, I see a "complicated" (for the lack of a more appropriate word) relationship between the humanities and public engagement. One may blame the scientification and managerialization of the academy and the attendant embrace of metrics which cannot capture outreach and its purported impacts (but neither can they capture the impact of publications) as well as the resultant penalizing of what may be termed "public humanities." However, more often than not, it seems to me, humanities scholars (the broad field of cultural studies, in particular) seem to struggle not necessarily to *reach out to the public*, but to *reach the public*. The reasons for being unable (or unwilling) to do so are most definitely numerous and varied, but the general lack of interaction with the public in a field that (purportedly) engages with society and culture is startling—and does not bode well for any claims that the humanities matter. In short, too often, we shoot ourselves (and/or the one standing next to us) in the foot.

As far as the underfunding of the humanities is concerned, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States, humanities departments constantly face budget cuts (if not being on the brink of being cut entirely). Here in Austria, the (neo)liberalization of universities is still in its infancy. In part, this is because all of the larger universities are primarily financed through public funds (whether directly or indirectly). In addition, major cuts in the budgets of humanities departments have so far been averted by funding schemes geared toward the humanities and political interventions. In that respect, we can count ourselves lucky—at least for now, for signs indicate that the systems in the UK and US are among the ideals Austrian politicians and university managements aspire toward (hence, we know where the train is going).

In contrast to Hawkes, one may wonder whether it might, in fact, not be *a good time* to launch a journal, in particular a gold open-access one. After all, the traditional ways of publishing research have been changing dramatically in recent years. As library budgets are diminishing and funding agencies across Europe have been increasingly implementing open-access mandates, there is an apparent *need for* journals (and monograph publishers) committed to open access. To be sure, we are not the first American studies journal to take the open-access route. Journals such as the *European Journal of American Studies* and the *American Studies Journal* have been open access for a number of years. But the success of journals such as these and the emergence of new open-access journals in the field testifies to the need for these publication outlets.

I do not think that the many benefits open access entails need to be regurgitated here, as they should be well known by now (newcomers to the discussion surrounding open access may just google and/or avail themselves of Martin Paul Eve's excellent book *Open Access and the Humanities* [2014][2]—of course available for free); neither do I want to counter the criticisms usually leveraged against open access, as such an approach would render the purported "disadvantages" of open access more credible than they actually are (for your information: we peer-review articles, we do not charge any publication fees, and we are looking for a long-term digital preservation solution). However, in view of one of the points raised above, I should point out that offering the public *access to* our research—and making our research *accessible to* the public—may help us *reach* the public and hopefully stimulate critical thinking in the public. This is urgently needed in a time when filter bubbles on social media increasingly shape—and black-and-white worldviews dominate—global politics.

But back to the journal. What you see (and hopefully read) here today is the first issue of *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies*. *JAAAS* replaces a book series the Austrian Association for American Studies launched in 2003 and published on an annual basis (more or less). Due to an advantageous deal with LIT Verlag, the publisher of the book series, all of the volumes will be made publicly accessible soon.[3] The book series, American Studies in Austria, is still active (and the editors welcome book proposals), but *JAAAS* now functions as the association's primary publication channel.

Following this inaugural issue, *JAAAS* will appear twice a year and will publish research articles in the broad field of American studies, short essays on innovative topics and/or novel approaches, forums on "hot" topics, reports on current research in Austrian American studies, and reviews. Of course, this first issue is just a start. With an endeavor such as the establishment of a new journal, you would expect a long list of individuals and institutions we should thank. However, this journal exem-

plifies "scholar-led" publishing. Currently, we do not have any editorial assistants to help us operate this journal (and the people doing most of the work behind the scenes are on part-time, fixed-term contracts). Nevertheless, we would like to thank the University of Graz for a start-up grant, hosting the journal, and managing the Open Journal Systems installation this journal runs on. At the University of Graz, we would like to extend our thanks to the "OA Team," Lisa Schilhan and Christian Kaier, for their commitment to open access, two members of the University of Graz's IT staff, Burkhard Salomon, who set up the journal, and Karl Rizzolli, who provides technical support, and Roman Klug, who designed the template for the pdf version of our journal. Of course, we also thank the Public Knowledge Project and the OJS community for their work on OJS. Most of all, however, we would like to thank our authors and peer reviewers—without them, operating this journal would not be possible.

December 2019

Michael Fuchs
Managing Editor
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Notes

1 Terence Hawkes, "Editorial," *Textual Practice* 1, no. 1 (1987): 1, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502368708582003.

2 Martin Paul Eve, *Open Access and the Humanities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316161012.

3 See "American Studies in Austria Book Series," *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies*, accessed December 15, 2019, https://jaaas.eu/index.php/jaaas/amsa.

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.[1] 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 America 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 Schultermandl 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 Schultermandl 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.)[2]

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[3]

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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Hanna Wallinger and Joshua Parker
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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.

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).

"Huck Finn at King Arthur's Court"

F. O. Matthiessen, the Salzburg Seminar, and American Studies

Ralph J. Poole

Abstract

F. O. Matthiessen was a key player in an event which took place at Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg in the summer of 1947 and which launched the legendary Salzburg Seminar and which may be considered the birth of American studies in Europe. Matthiessen's reflections on this remarkable session, *From the Heart of Europe*, remains outstanding in its conjuring of a humanist vision amidst ruins. This travelogue, his last major—if largely forgotten—work published shortly before his suicide, has been variously reassessed as an elegiac document of his tragic failure as a politically deluded scholar and as a groundbreaking foray into sketching out a radically alternate transnational understanding of American studies *avant la lettre*. These highly diverging perspectives on Matthiessen's final book, in particular, and on the professional and personal troubles during his last years, more generally, account for the lasting myth-making fascination with Matthiessen, which has left its mark not only on academic discourses ranging from socialist criticism to queer theory but may also be found in the novels of May Sarton (*Faithful Are the Wounds*) and Mark Merlis (*American Studies*). Hence, this article reflects on Matthiessen's impact on the 1947 seminar and traces the legacy of this controversial founding father of American studies.

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Peer Review: This invited article was reviewed by the issue's guest editors.

“Huck Finn at King Arthur’s Court”

F. O. Matthiessen, the Salzburg Seminar, and American Studies

Ralph J. Poole

It was seventy years ago when in the summer of 1947 a trio of Harvard graduate students, Scott Elledge, Richard Campbell and the Vienna-born Clemens Heller, organized a scholarly workshop at Schloss Leopoldskron in Austria. This summer school has since become famous as the “Salzburg Seminar.” The group gathering in Salzburg consisted of ninety European students and scholars as well as thirty American students and scholars, and it was announced as an introduction to “American Civilization.” To be sure, from today’s standpoint, this six-week-session was an inaugural event in the development of American studies in post-war Europe. One just has to consider the historical situation—the war having ended only two years before, Austria being a country occupied by the Allied Forces, and Salzburg as the center of the American occupation. At the Schloss, besides the rather desolate state of the building itself, the provision of food was not guaranteed at all times: “We had been living on a diet mostly of bread and potatoes, with always the question of what might happen if our next food car from Switzerland did not arrive on schedule. But most of us had managed to disregard even the *ersatz* coffee and the dwindling rations of cigarettes.”[1] Indeed, bringing together people from Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and Spain as well as seven displaced persons was no small feat and would not be repeated until the 1960s with regards to Eastern European participants.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead was among the illustrious faculty. In her report to the Harvard Student Council, which in parts funded the session, she comments on the encounter of students from former enemy countries at a location that is so laden with history, and she suggests that it was precisely the castle itself that facilitated an environment of productive and peaceful otherworldliness:

> From a Europe where no one will ever live again the kind of life for which the Leopoldskron is an appropriate setting, the European students walked, as it were, upon a stage where some of the insistent difficulties of their real life could be forgotten. The first shock as they found themselves sitting side by side with men whom two short years ago they might have killed was softened as they saw themselves reflected back, in the dim lights, from the great mirrors. Throughout the Seminar, the loveliness and unreality of the setting consistently muted stridencies which might have developed.[2]

Besides the evocation of the seminar as a stage transcending reality—the first ghost of my essay—what is of interest for a literary scholar as myself is Mead's emphasis on the importance of literature in negotiating a transatlantic alliance. There were sessions and lectures on history, politics, sociology, anthropology, economics and arts, and yet Mead—herself an anthropologist—felt "it is impossible to emphasize the importance to the Seminar of lectures on American Literature because they communicated the sense of a living literature, and of a culture to which self-criticism is a necessary condition of life."[3] Thus, Mead chose literature as the field most valuable to the communication between America and Europe.[4] F. O. Matthiessen, Alfred Kazin, Vida Ginsberg, and the Italian scholar Mario Praz were the faculty members responsible for literature, and arguably it was Matthiessen who had the strongest and most lasting impact. In what follows, I want to sketch out his specific approach to the session as outlined especially in his welcome address, then move on to the political ramifications of this first session for Matthiessen, and finally stake out some unresolved discrepancies in Matthiessen's legacy as a major but controversial founding father of American studies, ultimately leading to the question: In what ways does Matthiessen still matter for us?

"[H]ere was our Brook Farm"; Or, "Isn't there a ghost in this romantic old castle?" Matthiessen's "Communistic" Vision for a Future of American Studies in Europe

> They are alway *there*, specters, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.
> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (1993)

Matthiessen was chosen to give the welcome address to the first Salzburg seminar.[5] In the by now legendary speech, he outlined what he thought the agenda of the seminar should be. The address was delivered on the castle's terrace and Matthiessen believed he could sense Max Reinhardt's spirit (who is my second ghost appearing) being rekindled in an atmosphere that Matthiessen likened to Hollywood's opulent

glamour:

> I kept wondering when the Hollywood floodlights would be turned on. How else can you feel when you eat your meals in a forty-foot-high marble hall beneath an immense allegorical representation of the mid-eighteenth-century Bishop of Salzburg building Schloss Leopoldskron for his nephew, and beneath yards and yards more of flamboyant wall and ceiling painting in a style which, unfortunately, Hollywood could imitate almost as successfully from the Venetian school as the derivative painters here had done? . . . The one public room which shows a fully mastered style is a charming example of eighteenth-century chinoiserie, with brightly lacquered walls, a little faint now through exposure to damp before the window panes were replaced this spring, and with terra-cotta figurines over the two doors seeming to represent, quite appropriately, the spirit of tragedy and of comedy. Here in this corner room above the terrace Reinhardt and his guests must have passed many animated evenings. And since this is the room set aside for our discussion groups, here—though Reinhardt died in America while his castle was occupied by the Nazis—thought can again spring free.[6]

Right at the beginning, Matthiessen stresses the promising "luxury of an historical awareness" of this very special occasion, where people "from many countries and across the gulf of war" have come together "to enact anew the chief function of culture and humanism, to bring man again into communication with man." Being fully aware of "questions, doubts, even suspicions" that lie "beneath the pleasant surfaces," he takes it for granted that with differing political leanings, a common denominator is that all are "strong anti-Fascists." What is at stake is "to probe again to the nature of man." To do so, he refers to the American democratic legacy as yardstick, calling Americans "the Romans of the modern world." But, he continues, "none of our group come as imperialists of the pax Americana to impose our values upon you." Instead, similar to Margaret Mead, he asserts the "sharp critical sense" of the excesses and limitations of the American system as "saving characteristic of American civilization."[7]

The self-critical nod allows Matthiessen to perform a double move toward reversal and inclusion: referring to the "continuing involvement in Europe," he reminds his audience that Americans have come to Europe as students before—as "passionate pilgrims" such as Henry James or as "innocents abroad" such as Mark Twain. But these are times past, now is the time to reverse the trajectory and bring something to Europe, namely American civilization as savior of the here and now. In an inclusive gesture, he specifies this Americanness by referring to the names of the Americans, which are "no longer predominantly Anglo-Saxon" but originating from various other parts of Europe, pointing out that the "mingling suggested by our names is America at its best" and the "completely equal rights" at the core of this mingling serves as

"the only solid basis for any truly united peoples or United Nations of the present or future."[8] This gesture not only emphasizes the diversity of Americans, but more importantly the communality of all kinds of people across national borders.

Turning to the specific event of the seminar and underlining its uniqueness, Matthiessen's poetic streak comes to the fore when he goes into raptures about "our island of peace in a storm-crowded sea" and about living "in a castle out of a baroque past," which makes him feel "as though I was Huck Finn at King Arthur's Court,"[9] the hyperbolic quote I chose for my essay's title. Having already evoked Twain and his humorous pilgrim's travelogue *Innocents Abroad* (1869), he fuses two more famous texts by Twain into an ambiguous composite. Substituting the magician Yankee from Connecticut at King Arthur's Court for Huck Finn, he seems to emphasize the innocence of experience once again, even though this can only be taken figuratively considering Matthiessen's own worldly middle-age in contrast to Huck's solely youthful American adventures that take him nowhere near any European abode but toward the American deep south instead. Although Matthiessen is more a "Connecticut Yankee" than a "Huck Finn," he embraces Huck's quixotic adventures and endows Schloss Leopoldskron—as King Arthur's Court—with a curiously ironic twist: The Schloss is out of time and place, a fantastic idea of the past that can only be approached through mocking distancing. The island metaphor evoked earlier gains added prominence, as the eighteenth-century Schloss is transported even further into a distant past and a remote location, King Arthur's Court. Clearly, Matthiessen here emphasizes a feeling of estrangement, albeit delivered with an ironic pose, of being out of his safe terrain performing an impossible feat. The reference to Max Reinhardt immediately afterwards and his theatrical endeavors at Schloss Leopoldskron support Matthiessen's feelings of being on a stage in a role that doesn't quite fit.

This mood of spatiotemporal misfit continues during the remainder of the welcome speech and leads me to the evocation of ghosts (much like Derrida's suggestion quoted in the epigraph to this section[10]) that permeate Matthiessen's memoir-travelogue *From the Heart of Europe*, which includes this welcome address in full length—although perhaps edited in hindsight.[11] Constantly referring to the past as reflection of the present, Matthiessen, for example, links the Salzburg experiment to Ralph Waldo Emerson's call "that thought can be action" and praises the results at the Schloss as realization of "our Brook Farm, here was our ideal communistic experiment."[12] Matthiessen thus makes a bold pledge for the power of the mind to transcend the limitations of the here and now.[13] This agenda is in line with his Christian socialist belief in the lasting power of democratic community as attested in the American literary tradition. It is also a promise for a transformative convergence of politics and aesthetics based on an internationalization of American studies, which

makes Matthiessen an early thinker and bridge builder leading to the identity politics of the much-hailed transnational turn in American studies in the 1990s:

> My argument is that what we today call identity emerged as a lyrical expression of exclusion before it was filled with specific ethnic content, and this can be traced back—via Matthiessen—to the need to find a replacement for avant-garde provocations and national traditions in a postwar landscape that seemed increasingly transnational in its destruction and reorganization. Identity emerges at the margins of history, tradition, or ideology as that which cannot be reduced to the national, the avant-garde, or the "official opposites" of the Cold War.[14]

Andrew Gross is one of a number of Americanists who have recently reevaluated Matthiessen, and I will return to some other such reappraisals below. But staying with the 1947 seminar for a while longer, the reader may find it surprising that of the writers Matthiessen selected, Henry James stands out for me because he seems to be the most unlikely candidate to discuss in the given situation in Salzburg. My perhaps somewhat compulsive interest in this particular ghost Matthiessen was conjuring up rests in his fashioning James as apt moral guide to current affairs—against all plausible odds.[15] Matthiessen chose *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) for his students, partly because it was "the James novel most available," but also because "it was very suitable to the occasion, since, through Isabel Archer, James made one of his freshest studies of the American's discovery of Europe."[16] Unlike Hawthorne or Melville, whose works did not correspond to a nineteenth-century European tradition, James, for Matthiessen, related to Europeans who "could draw immediate analogies with their own heritage."[17] The "peculiar poignancy" was in reading this novel "in a Europe so different from the undisturbed world of his [i.e., James's] prime."[18]

Two related images stand out in Matthiessen's assessment of that moment: the ruin and the ghost. Matthiessen reads and remembers James in a fresh light while in Schloss Leopoldskron, with a new sensibility to James's evocation of ghosts. In his recollection of the seminar, he quotes Isabel (albeit in an abridged manner), who upon seeing Gardencourt for the first time asks, "Please tell me—isn't there a ghost . . . in this romantic old house?" The invalid cousin Ralph responds:

> I might show it to you, but you'd never see it. The privilege isn't given to every one; it's not enviable. It has never been seen by a young, happy, innocent person like you. You must have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it. I saw it long ago.[19]

Matthiessen points out that the theme of the ghost reappears at the very end, "when Isabel, alone in her room, has a sure premonition of the very instant of Ralph's death. At last, with the fullest intensity of suffering, she recognizes that ghost."[20]

Matthiessen does not, however, mention Isabel's exact reaction to the ghost. She feels summoned by "a vague, hovering figure in the vagueness of the room" and sees "his white face—his kind eyes; then she saw there was nothing. She was not afraid; she was only sure."[21] What Matthiessen calls Isabel's "fullest intensity of suffering" is accompanied by a kind, ghostly figure and her unafraid surety of an announced death.

Notably, Matthiessen would focus on Ralph instead of Isabel, even though the novel is not about Ralph at all. But Matthiessen singles out Ralph as the character that survived James for a contemporary audience, providing "release" for "young American soldiers" as well as to his European students in Salzburg.[22] According to Matthiessen, James's "inwardness" and sense of "order" serves as "bulwark against disorder" and "the unrelenting outwardness" of war sufferings. Matthiessen concludes: "In a world of breakdown such as [James] never conceived, we can now find in his work, not an escape, but a renewed sense of the dignity of the human spirit, however precarious this may be in our own overwhelming sense of imminent ruin."[23]

Now, we may want to conclude that Matthiessen is simply delusional and ridiculous. But then, it may suit Matthiessen especially well to pull the strange, odd—not to say queer—character of Ralph to the forefront declaring him the emotional center of the novel. As much as Ralph harbors a queer kinship to his cousin Isabel, one could say Matthiessen feels such a kinship to Ralph.[24] He quotes James's eccentric appraisal of Ralph: "His serenity was but the array of wild flowers niched in his ruin."[25] Through James, Matthiessen confronts us with a duplicitous and highly paradoxical ascription: Ralph's ruinous state of mind offers an impression of calmness, but what would otherwise be most likely called apathetic resignation to fate here harbors the opposite of desolation and death, namely the eccentric beauty and uncontrolled energy of wild flowers, however much hidden they may flourish.

Some queerly interested James critics have suggested reading Ralph's ghostly appearance not as a marker of uncanniness, as a repressed specter of the past haunting the present, but as having a presence that provides an immediate and immanent meaning. Such an understanding of the ghost leads to the possibility of recognition and to the "desire for recognition from a loved one."[26] If we are willing to see Ralph not within a hermeneutics of suspicion, the suspicion here being that his lingering ailment is a sign of his failed masculinity, but as a figure surpassing the limiting effects of heteronormative ascriptions, then his ghostly appearance may be read as a liberating experience transferring life onto Isabel and setting her free to decide on her future. This ghost wants to reach out and connect, not to haunt but to communicate with those who understand.[27]

One has to remember that Matthiessen, "rejected by the Marine Corps for being

too short,"[28] chose to write a book on Henry James during the war instead, declaring it "my overaged contribution to the war effort" when it was published in 1944.[29] He specifically acknowledged the role of his Harvard undergraduate students "who, during the tense winters of '42 and '43, kept insisting that until they were needed by the Army, they meant to continue to get the best education they could." The students felt the need to stress the importance of literature in times of war and urged him to be serious about his book on James, believing "that in a total war the preservation of art and thought should be a leading aim. They persuaded me to continue to believe it."[30] Matthiessen's interest in the ghostly, ruinous figure of Ralph in the "city of ghosts" that is post-war Salzburg and in a castle that harbors so many ghostly memories is therefore highly significant.[31] It is not the inexperienced Isabel, but rather Ralph, who has seen and suffered all, that Matthiessen believes to be speaking to his students as herald of "the dignity of the human spirit" amidst ruins.

In one of his recollections of the seminar, Alfred Kazin emphasizes Matthiessen's "sympathetic reading of *The Portrait of a Lady*" and the "extraordinary resonance" this reading had on the European audience.[32] Matthiessen reading James in Salzburg makes Kazin think about how places speak to persons and how one has to realign "dreamy" pictures with dreary realities. According to Kazin, it was largely thanks to Matthiessen that the Salzburg endeavor was a success with respect to building a bridge between Americans and Europeans. But Kazin also sheds a more critical light on the driving motives of his colleague, seeing a tormented soul behind Matthiessen's engaging lecturing. He describes his colleague as someone "who fascinates the European students, holds them in his grip, through an astonishing personal intensity, a positively violent caringness about everything he believes in and is concerned with that he cannot suppress in public. What drives the man and torments him so?"[33]

"The Pieces of This Death": The First Martyr of the Cold War; Or, Matthiessen's Halo

> Why didn't the American critic F. O. Matthiessen write a history of gay American writing?
>
> Colm Tóibín, *Love in a Dark Time and Other Explanations of Gay Lives and Literature* (2002)

In her novel *Faithful Are the Wounds* (1955), May Sarton tried to provide an answer to Kazin's question. The book was published five years after Matthiessen committed suicide by jumping off the twelfth floor of the Hotel Manger in Boston. Speculations about his suicide certainly helped to propel Matthiessen to a mythicized, if disputed, celebrity in the academic world, and Sarton's novel participated in this myth-making, as did an astounding volume published in the year of Matthiessen's

death in which friends, colleagues, and students such as Henry Nash Smith and Kazin gave their impressions of the late Matthiessen.

One portraitist was Sarton, who wrote a poem, "The Pieces of This Death (for F. O. M.)," which opens with these lines:

> Bitter the loneliness,
> His who has died of it,
> Ours who still live within
> The torn world, each a part
> Of the huge beating heart.[34]

The poem goes on to ask "Who speaks or could have spoken / To that implacable no?" presumably meaning Matthiessen's choice of death. There are references to his "anger," to his seeming cruelty, to his "tortured dream," and to the wounds caused "when angered flared."[35] Ultimately, she forecasts the longevity of his legacy:

> The pieces of this death
> We shall be picking up;
> The anguish in his cup
> We drink and long shall drink.[36]

Her elegiac call admits to guilt in the repeated verse "He died of the world, of us."

With her novel *Faithful Are the Wounds*, Sarton was perhaps the first to try and piece together Matthiessen's death. Picking up on her reference to wounds in her poem, the admission of a collective guilt serves as major message of the novel, as well. The novel's title draws on a passage in Proverbs, which reads in full, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend. But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."[37] While there are barely any kisses in the novel, by enemies *or* lovers, the images of wounding abound. The novel largely downgrades the Matthiessen character, named Edward Cavan, who kills himself by jumping in front of a train, to a secondary role. Sarton focuses on the story of those who try to make sense of his death. In other words, this is a novel about Matthiessen without Matthiessen, a ghost story of sorts with Matthiessen-as-specter *seemingly* haunting those who have outlived him.[38] It turns out, though, that he is a figure like James's Ralph in that he revisits his friends, family, and adversaries through their guilty memories and his ghostly visits ultimately bring about recognition, appeasement, and potentiality. One of his close friends claims that "[h]e shut us all out" and that "he was a living wound at the end," while a student of his sees it differently, opining, "The world had broken in two, not Edward Cavan. Edward Cavan was intact. He had let himself be savaged by an elevated train to remain intact, leaving the world all breaking to pieces, leaving the loneliness inside everyone else, the awful, bitter sense of failure and guilt inside everyone else." His

major adversary evokes another image pervading the novel, that of an imprisoned visionary: "Quite a few pilots got killed trying to break the sound barrier, you know—and you might call it suicide, in a way . . .. Edward was trying to break through a much more difficult barrier, a human barrier, to unite the intellect and life, to make man whole."[39]

In one of the rare moments in which Cavan does appear, a friend remembers him saying, "I feel locked in, locked up, stifled." His friend responds that it must have been different in Europe, reminding him of the fighting conviction and energetic warmth he had brought back from that summer at the Salzburg Seminar. In contrast to his energizing European experience, he sees himself as impotent helpmate of an emasculating system:

> Good God, yes. In Europe the intellectual is still part of life itself. I'm tired of being a kind of governess without real responsibility, without dignity, someone who may be turned out . . . at any moment at the whim of the employer—and who is only considered responsible as long as he is not responsible. They're making eunuchs of us.[40]

Astonishingly, the word "queer" frequently appears in the novel (at least twenty-four times by my count). Although there are several hints about Cavan being odd, not interested in women, and visiting strange bars at night, nowhere is his homosexuality explicitly stated. One of Cavan's closest friends perhaps recognizes his growing depression. Unable to really reach him, she comes to the realization that ultimately "[a]ll real lives are secret . . ., frightfully secret. No one knows anyone else. Friendship, even love, fails. We are alone."[41] Notably, Sarton, a lesbian herself, had no idea of Matthiessen being queer.[42] Nevertheless, I claim *Faithful Are the Wounds* to be a creative act of remembering, a memory narrative in Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed's terminology. Through its collective voice remembering a dissident outcast, the novel tries not only to make sense of past events but also to act in a socially transformative way:

> Beyond the need to remember something specific, however, we claim that memory is an act of resistance, regardless of its content. By "memory" we mean a process at once disruptive and inventive. . . . memories are not retrievals of an archived past but something more imaginative and more driven by present needs. . . . It is the creative aspect of memory that makes it valuable as a socially transformative medium. . . . memory is produced from need: singly or collectively, we remember what we need to know.[43]

All the voices of Sarton's novel come to terms with their respective pasts in relation to Cavan, realizing that the process of remembering allows them to envision different futures. I have already alluded to the notion of "hermeneutics of suspicion," a

phrase attributed to Paul Ricœur but taken up by Eve Sedgwick in her distinction of paranoid from reparative readings. Sedgwick writes that in a post-Freudian mindset, paranoia has become "less a diagnosis than a prescription. In a world where no one need be delusional to find evidence of systemic oppression, to theorize out of anything but a paranoid critical stance has come to seem naïve, pious, or complaisant." Part of the lure of the paranoid impulse lies, Sedgwick quips, "in a property of paranoia itself: simply put, paranoia tends to be contagious."[44]

In this sense, Sarton's novel addresses *and* distances itself from continuing the contagiousness of the witch hunt that her character Cavan, and by extension Matthiessen, suffered through, opting for a precarious experiment in following a reparative impulse instead that is "additive and accretive" rather than addictive and contagious: "At a textual level, it seems to me that related practices of reparative knowing may lie, barely recognized and little explored, at the heart of many histories of gay, lesbian, and queer intertextuality."[45] Reparative readings try to do justice in Sedgwick's theory; they provide hope for a different future but also imagine pasts that could have happened differently. While Sarton does not envision different pasts, she conjures up ethical possibilities that question moral orders of the present, which are taken for ontological absolutes. According to Giorgio Agamben, "The just person does not reside in another world. . . . What changes are not the things but their limits. It is as if there hovered over them something like a halo, a glory."[46] Sarton, writing in the midst of McCarthyism's poisonous—paranoid—cultural climate of suspicions, anticipates what Agamben, referring to the Catholic tradition, calls a halo which the dead obtain upon entering heaven as "a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable. The being that has reached its end, that has consumed all of its possibilities, thus receives as a gift a supplemental possibility."[47] To the point of a quasi-sanctification of a sacrificed hero, there is also a worldly playfulness in Agamben's metaphysics, a hope for change in the face of darkness, and the creative act of remembering reaches back to the dead "to offer them a supplemental possibility in the minds of those who remember. Memory, in this sense, is the halo of the living."[48] I understand Sarton's novel exactly in this sense when Cavan's estranged sister says, "You see, in a queer way it's as if Edward had died for me a long time ago. And now every moment he's becoming more alive."[49]

Drawing on Sedgwick's argument that intertextuality is at the core of many queer reparative texts, it may not be too far-fetched to mention that the name "Cavan" conjures up the Irish count name of the James family's ancestral home. In addition, there is a moment in Cavan's memorial service when his ghost seems to appear and the reading of John Donne's "No man is an Island" sermon triggering the "separate individuals" of the mourners to "become one, lifted like a wave toward the presence of the dead, suddenly alive among them in that communion which he had not been

able to find in life." Cavan's sister Isabel (again: is the name a coincidence?) has a Jamesian epiphany when feeling being lifted up "beyond herself, like a release from bondage," both presumably her own and that of the brother: "Tenderness for her brother filled her like a blessing. He's at peace now, she thought. He doesn't have to be torn to pieces any longer."[50] In view of Matthiessen's Christian belief, Sarton may have been "fully aware of the religious dimension of Matthiessen's unhappy life and tragic death," as Mark Walhout suggests in an article titled "F. O Matthiessen and the Future of American Studies":

> [W]e need to learn how our literature can help us renew democratic community for a new millennium. This is a subject on which Matthiessen still has something to teach us . . ., because he understood that democratic community cannot be achieved by politics alone. . . . It was Matthiessen's conviction that the American literary tradition constituted a resource for such an effort. . . . By understanding him the goal of American Studies becomes more clear: the renewal of democratic community in the post-Cold War era.[51]

Walhout's essay is noteworthy for its claim to reconsider Matthiessen's particular religiosity in conjunction with his reliance on the democratic streak in American literature as relevant for continuing American studies in the future. Leo Marx, a former student of Matthiessen, wrote in 1983 that "[i]t comes as something of a shock, if also an encouraging index of cultural change, to realize that as recently as 1950 Matthiessen's friends considered his homosexuality unmentionable—at least in print." The inhibiting silence in the collective portrait as well as in Sarton's novel has led, Marx suggests, to a distorting effect and "is discernible in just about everything that has been written about Matthiessen."[52] Indeed, Marx was one of the first to not only publicly acknowledge Matthiessen's homosexuality but to relate it to his work as an essential element of understanding. In the essay called "'Double Consciousness' and the Cultural Politics of F. O. Matthiessen," to which I have been referring, Marx writes about the "debilitating sense of disunity" which attracted Matthiessen to the five writers of "his" American Renaissance—Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman—but the "special resonance" of the double consciousness can be perceived in Matthiessen's own life: "to be a Harvard professor and a homosexual."[53]

Up until Marx's revaluation, Matthiessen's legacy had habitually been connected to failure: failure to live up to his vision of Christian socialism, failure to publicly admit his homosexuality, and a failure to face life. More often than not, his suicide was perceived as a self-sacrificing act due to all those failures in his political judgements, his scholarly ambitions, and his personal longings.[54] In fact, you can repeatedly read that Matthiessen was the first martyr of the Cold War, which brings us right back to Salzburg.

Matthiessen's account of the 1947 Salzburg seminar was published a year later as *From the Heart of Europe*, his final and still largely neglected book, from which I have extensively been quoting. Part memoir, part travelogue, part educational program, and part political pamphlet, the book met with mixed reception, some of which was outright damning. The dual claim among his critics was that the book was of gross naivety and that it refused to condemn Stalinism. Irving Howe, for example, accused Matthiessen of an eagerness "to sidle up to 'the people,'" of being a relic, seduced by "'comrades' marching 'arm in arm'" by "the pulpy *schwärmerei* of progressivist festivity," and of writing in "that falsely-charged prose style of the fellow-traveler atremble before the glories of the 'new world'—a style that might be called *vibrato intime*."[55] An anonymous *Time*'s reviewer noted that "Harvard Professor Francis Otto Matthiessen is a bald, mild-mannered little bachelor who thinks the job of U.S. intellectuals is to 'rediscover and rearticulate' the needs for Socialism.... Seldom has the gullibility and wishful thinking of pinkish academic intellectuals been so perfectly exposed as in this little book."[56] Matthiessen, who was known to ignore reviews, had left this particular one on his desk together with a suicide note:

> I am exhausted. I have been subject to so many severe depressions during the past few years that I can no longer believe that I can continue to be of use to my profession and my friends. I hope that my friends will be able to believe that I still love them in spite of this desperate act. . . . How much the state of the world has to do with my state of mind I do not know. But as a Christian and a socialist believing in international peace, I find myself terribly oppressed by the present tensions.[57]

Later comments would connect the failure of his last book to Matthiessen's suicide two years later, alongside his other matching "failures" such as "foolishly" supporting the candidate of the Progressive Party, Henry Wallace, in the 1948 presidential campaign, his commitment to the radical Harvard Teachers Union, his clash with the university's President Conant for not interfering with the firing of colleagues thought to be linked to Communism, and ultimately for refusing to name—i.e., denounce—other purported communist "fellow-travelers."[58]

In this context, it is important to debunk some of the mythic accounts of the first Salzburg Seminar that prevent us from recognizing the lapses that occurred in the overall success story, and one of the major breaks in that story concerns Matthiessen.[59] There were critical voices from the start, and they became vociferous after the session. The seminar was not solely funded by the Harvard Student Council, but also by private donors and above all by the World Student Relief organization in Geneva, "an international student organization founded after World War I with the purpose of aiding needy students."[60] While the Harvard group, including Matthiessen, suggested the title "American Civilization," the World Student Relief was skep-

tical, fearing U.S. propaganda, and suggested the bilateral title "Civilization: Europe and America" and also "proposed to invite an equal number of European and American scholars to teach at the summer school."[61] Although the Harvard group succeeded in their plans, other and more lasting criticism came from the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), the early Cold War intelligence agency within the United States Army, who monitored the session due to suspicions pertaining to certain subversive participants. Already in July 1947, a secret report identified "Communist activity at Harvard University Seminar at Salzburg."[62] Matthiessen was the first victim of these "un-American" activities, denied visa permits, and thus barred from rejoining the Seminar the following year. When the Education Division of the American Military authorities in Austria reviewed the program proposal for the 1948 session, it attested "a great improvement over last year's program" because "Prof. Matthiessen of Harvard who conducted some rather questionable discussions last summer had been eliminated from the forthcoming Seminar."[63] Matthiessen was replaced by Henry Nash Smith, ironically a student of Matthiessen.[64] Furthermore, while 1950 marked the official consolidation of the Salzburg Seminar, as secured funding allowed the launch of the "Salzburg Seminar for American Studies," Matthiessen again had applied for and was rejected a visa to attend. In fact, he was not "allowed back into the American zones of occupation [after] he published *From the Heart of Europe* in 1948."[65]

The Whitmanesque Hard-On; Or, Matthiessen as Companionable Ghost

> Going into the cathedral this morning we passed a workman—husky broad-shouldered, 40, the perfect Chaucerian yeoman. . . . Afterwards while I was standing alone in the choir he came up and said: "Fine old building, sir." His voice was unusually gentle, his eye a dark full brown. We stood there talking a quarter of a minute, and as he went on I deliberately let my elbow rub against his belly. That was all: there couldn't have been anything more. I didn't want anything more. I was simply attracted by him as a simple open-hearted feller, and wanted to feel the touch of his body as a passing gesture. I had a hard on but there was no question of not wanting to keep myself for you.[66]

Yes, this is Matthiessen, writing as "Devil" to his "Rat," Russell Cheney. Those were the pet names Matthiessen and his partner used in their private correspondence, published by their friend Louis Hyde in 1978. I want to use this perhaps inappropriate quote to look into the future of American studies. To do so, I am taking my first cue from the 1924 entry in Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors's *New Literary History of America* (2009). The entry, written by Robert Polito, is marked as "1924: F. O. Matthiessen meets Russell Cheney on the ocean liner Paris, and American literary his-

tory emerges from Skull and Bones."[67] Accordingly, Matthiessen's contribution to this particular history of American literature is not the 1941 publication of *American Renaissance* (the 1941 entry is Werner Sollors's article on "The Word 'Multicultural'"), but his meeting his future life companion as well as his admission of having attained "complete harmony" with Cheney.[68] Polito reads *American Renaissance* under its originally intended Whitmanesque title, *Man in the Open Air*, as a "vast, tangled, serpentine conversation among the dead and the living," but ultimately a "scholarly valentine to Cheney, for it was the painter who introduced his companion to American literature, particularly to Whitman."[69]

This recent approach to Matthiessen is significant and has been possible only after the publication of his letters to his partner Cheney, who was twenty years his senior. To be sure, Matthiessen's *American Renaissance* remains one of the founding texts of our field, regardless of how much the older generation may loathe the nearly unreadable book, while younger scholars may have never opened the massive tome. Today, we have come to acknowledge that Matthiessen was far from a formalist and a precursor to New Criticism that many—including Nina Baym, Myra Jehlen, and Donald Pease—for a long time claimed him to be. Nowadays, we may wonder if Matthiessen's study has been used and been appropriated against his intentions in order to authorize a specific era and specific writers to hegemonically nationalize and thus empower the project of American studies.[70] Knowledge about Matthiessen through the letters exchanged with Cheney has changed our view on an alleged tragic figure of the early days of American studies, and a look at the flurry of revisions—some homophobically negative, but most celebratorily positive and many from former colleagues, friends, and students—prove that Matthiessen has shaped generations of Americanists and continues to do so, by now in a future-oriented way.[71]

Rat and the Devil is not only noteworthy as a pre-Stonewall document chronicling the private but largely closeted lives of a male couple over the span of twenty years; it offers much more, such as introducing an alternative reading of Whitman alongside Matthiessen's official one in *American Renaissance*. Indeed, critics such as Jonathan Arac and Michael Cadden go as far as claiming that there are two Matthiessens in print.[72] Matthiessen, for example, counters Cheney's call for sexual abstinence with a quote from Whitman's "Body Electric," insisting on having a body with needs: "You say that our love is not based on the physical, but on our mutual understanding, and sympathy, and tenderness. And of course that is right. But we both have bodies: 'if the body is not the soul, what then is the soul?'"[73] Although an apt follower of sexological theory such as Edward Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), Matthiessen was well aware of living outside of sanctioned societal norms and links their lives as sexual pioneers to the American myth of the frontier:

> Of course this life of ours is entirely new—neither of us know of a parallel case. We stand in the middle of an unchartered, uninhabited country. That there have been other unions like ours is obvious, but we are unable to draw on their experience. We must create everything for ourselves. And creation is never easy.[74]

He even discusses their "new life" as "marriage," which remains a subject of debate even today:

> Marriage! What a strange word to be applied to two men! Can't you hear the hell-hounds of society baying full pursuit behind us? But that's just the point. We are beyond society. We've said thank you very much, and stepped outside and closed the door. In the eyes of the unknowing world we are a talented artist of wealth and position and a promising young graduate student. In the eyes of the knowing world we would be pariahs, outlaws, degenerates. This is indeed the price we pay for the unforgivable sin of being born different from the great run of mankind.
>
> And so we have a marriage that was never seen on land or sea and surely not in Tennyson's poet's dream! It is a marriage that demands nothing and gives everything. It does not limit the affections of the two parties, it gives their scope greater radiance and depth. Oh it is strange enough. It has no ring, and no vows, . . . and no children. . . . It has no three hundred and sixty-five breakfasts opposite each other at the same table; and yet it desires frequent companionship, devotion, and laughter. . . .
>
> How many, when reading this, would think so? Ah there's the mockery of it: those gates of society are of iron. And when you're outside, you've got to live in yourself alone, unless—o beatissimus—you are privileged to find another wanderer in the waste land.[75]

Indeed, one might claim that Matthiessen infused a queerness into American studies from its very start. At a time when nobody considered Sarah Orne Jewett worthwhile studying, Matthiessen, the seeming guy's guy, wrote his very first study in American literature on her in 1929. In this study, which he wrote in the Maine abode he shared with Cheney, he focusses on Jewett's intimate relation with Annie Fields.[76] And, obviously, of the "Gang of Five," as Polito calls Matthiessen's pantheon of white male writers constituting "his American Renaissance,"[77] three—Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman—are known today to have had homosexual leanings in whatever terminology one wants to apply to those feelings, for example Whitman's adhesiveness.

But then, many critics found the erotic focus in *American Renaissance* so troubling because it seemed to suggest a hidden agenda, starting with Matthiessen's announcement that the book was concerned chiefly with "the secret" of the life of the texts it discusses.[78] One also could think of Matthiessen's extraordinary analysis of Thomas Eakins's painting of naked young men, *The Swimming Hole* (1884–1885), whose reproduction is integrated into the Melville chapter, while the dis-

cussion follows two hundred pages later in his Whitman chapter. Clearly not part of the essential half-decade that comprises the book's overall scope, Matthiessen obviously considered the painting indispensable as a corollary to his textual analyses.[79] Capitalizing on the play of inside and outside, secretly closeted and out to the public, Henry Abelove relates part of such gossip to Matthiessen's openness about his sexuality to his fellow Skull and Bonesmen, that secret society at Yale where secrets were being kept for life—in contrast to his closetedness with regard to family, colleagues, and students.[80] "American Studies as a discipline," according to Abelove, "is a well-received and much-validated set of reaction-formations to questions like Matthiessen's, questions framed at the start of the discipline's development but immediately and thoroughly deflected, sacrificed, and repressed as were the questioners themselves."[81] Abelove thus suggests that the acknowledgment of the prompted but unasked question in *American Renaissance* about the meaning of the erotic dynamic of privileged white men for nineteenth-century American democracy should hopefully trigger an unraveling of the repressed impulses to assert queer studies "as present at the start of American Studies, as always part of the unconscious of American Studies. And the future of American Studies would then depend in large measure on whether or not that unconscious is permitted to return."[82] And there he appears again, the ghost, clad in therapeutic gear. Abelove's vision relies on deep gossip as "illicit speculation, information, knowledge," which is an "indispensable resource for those who are in any sense or measure disempowered . . . whenever it circulates in subterranean ways and touches on matters hard to grasp and of crucial concern."[83] Abelove's curiosity about Matthiessen, instilled via gossipy rumors while being a student in Harvard in the early 1960s, brought him pleasure then and now, but it also gave him "a useful perspective on what the discipline of American Studies is, has been, and might yet be."[84]

One such gossipy speculative perspective is taken up by Mark Merlis in his novel *American Studies* (1994). Like Sarton, Merlis chooses to approach Matthiessen fictitiously and indirectly and as a figure of the past, here a remoter past since the perspective is channeled through Reeve, a former student of Matthiessen and once-upon-a-time lover. In the diegetic now, Reeve is an elderly guy recovering from a violent assault by a hustler. Barely having escaped being killed, he is shamed and humiliated, and his best friend Howard mischievously brings him the one book he was never capable of reading: *The Invincible City* by Tom Slater, the Matthiessen double in Merlis's novel. Lying in bed, an ailing, aging man, Reeve likens his memories of Slater, the tragic closeted figure of his past, to his own present in what might be called a sentimentalizing of the trauma of gay history or even an uncanny repetition of a homophobic narrative that leads to a permanent state of emergency.[85] However, I would like to include Merlis's *American Studies* as part of the discourse on

reparative thinking, as one of the examples to unearth Matthiessen not as a traumatic incidence but as a dissident spirit kindly reminding Reeve to come to terms with his very own ghosts. The novel—and it would deserve a more extended reading than I can provide here—follows a "perversely presentist model of historical analysis, a model, in other words, that avoids the trap of simply projecting contemporary understandings back in time, but one that can apply insights from the present to conundrums of the past," to use Judith Halberstam's phrase,[86] or imagines "what *might have happened but didn't*," to draw on Sedgwick,[87] when Reeve remarks, "Our might-have-beens are not footnotes to the main text of how-it-was; they are the text."[88] The novel blends two characters of different generations (Slater aka Matthiessen as closeted teacher and Reeve as his student, who may not be closeted but experiences homophobia decades later), thereby creating a space of strange temporalities. In a move similar to Polito's, Merlis radically re-imagines the genealogy of American studies by changing the title of *American Renaissance* to *The Invincible City*, a reference to the Calamus cluster of poems in *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's most homoerotic sequence yet absent from *American Renaissance*.

> I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible to the
> attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth;
> I dream'd that was the new city of Friends;
> Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust
> love—it led the rest;
> It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of
> that city,
> And in all their looks and words.[89]

Transferring Matthiessen's youthful Whitmanesque hard-ons, which we read about in his private letters, to the sexually contained scholarly study of his *American Renaissance* re-introduces the absent cause of queer politics back into American studies, thus radically resignifying the primal scene of the field's imaginary.

Considering that we now know of their partnership, we can uncover traces of Cheney in many of Matthiessen's texts, from Cheney's illustrations in Matthiessen's first study on Jewett to Matthiessen's study on Cheney's paintings to the references to Cheney in *From the Heart of Europe*, which brings me back to Salzburg. Besides its relevance as a chronicle of the Salzburg Seminar, Matthiessen's last book is also a very private book, his only autobiographical work. In view of Matthiessen's understandable reticence to mix his private and public personae, this turn toward the autobiographical is truly astounding. Gross, who attests to the book's relevance as "an American studies 'quo vadis?'" also points out its quality as a "personal testimony that is, after all, the travelogue's dominant trope."[90] And, indeed, here Matthiessen discloses his relation to Cheney, who died two years earlier and left Mat-

thiessen deeply distressed:

> Salzburg is for me, in a special sense, a city of ghosts. Both the friends [i.e., Cheney and Hanns Kollar] I was here with last are now dead. At every turn that gives a vista of the medieval Festung on the hill or through the poplars to the swiftly rushing gray river, or, more particularly, at every intimate sight that requires an alert eye to pick it out at all: a half-hidden baroque crest over a door or an unexpectedly bright splash of color from a window box of geraniums and petunias at the end of an alley—at any delight of the eye in any place I ever was with Russel Cheney I am pierced with the realization of how much he taught me to see, of how life shared with him took on more vividness than I have ever felt in any other company.[91]

And it is here that ghosts take on a different shade. Clothed in a Jamesian rambling paratactic construction, this paragraph starts out with the presence of ghosts and ends with affectionately remembering the distinctness of a life shared with his late lover. This play of absence and presence continues, as Matthiessen finds himself speaking to Cheney whenever he sees something that is new or has changed and culminates in an admission of a community of the dead and the living:

> This is the only sense in which immortality has a meaning which I have experienced: these friends are as present to me now as when we were here together. And the evocation of their spirits by so many concrete reminders is, for the most part, not painful, since they bring with them many of the best hours I have known.[92]

Similar to Isabel, whose suffering allows her to see Ralph's ghost, facing him without fear, Matthiessen here remembers the past as being visited by kind, companionable ghosts.

In a daring leap from these otherworldly thoughts, Matthiessen in the next two paragraphs evokes two memories, not only connected to Cheney but also to physicality. He remembers a moment at Oxford that made him realize his earthy Americanness in contrast to the "cool" English upper-class fellow students. In a scenario that "might be lifted from an Eakins painting,"[93] he witnesses a scene of two English—not American—students stripping and having a naked swim when another boat with more English students appears and they cry out, "How disgusting! They must be Americans!" The irony is not lost on Matthiessen, so that even though he was not among the naked party, he still "became in reaction something of a chip-on-the-shoulder patriot" and turned to reading "American writers for the first time. Literature at Yale had still meant English literature. Whitman was my first big experience, particularly The Children of Adam and Calamus poems, which helped me begin to trust the body." Matthiessen here stresses two facts: the physicality of this—Amer-

ican—literature and his discovery of it in Europe, which, in turn, leads him to his third and perhaps most important memory: sharing them with Cheney. "In subsequent trips abroad in the nineteen-twenties and 'thirties it was *naturally* Europe and not America I was seeking. In that summer of 1931 Russell Cheney and I started out with some days in Holland . . ., and then went on through Germany towards Austria."[94] It was Cheney, as we know from the letters, who made Matthiessen cherish Whitman. Critics such as William Cain have suggested that

> Matthiessen tapped his passionate reading of Whitman to voice his love for Cheney. He communicated, and indeed sought to embody, the sexual and emotional vibrancies of the poet's words. As a sign of the manner in which institutions encroach on the personal, it is worth noting that the authorities at Harvard denied Matthiessen permission to write his dissertation on Whitman. There was nothing more to be said about Whitman, he was told.[95]

In his 1949 lecture "The Responsibilities of the Critic," Matthiessen confesses and proposes "an ever widening range of interests for the ideal critic[.] I have moved from his central responsibility to the text before him out to an awareness of some of the world-wide struggles of our age."[96] This ideal critic has to experience everything, here and now, and relate it to artists of the past: "This double quality of experiencing our own time to the full and yet being able to weigh it in relation to other times is what the critic must strive for, if he is to be able to discern and demand the works of art that we need most."[97] It is with such a responsibility that Matthiessen came to Salzburg in 1947, with a mission of hope but also to stir things up. Matthiessen, as the various portraits of this father figure of American studies in scholarly works and fiction writings demonstrate, continues to be a fascinatingly ambiguous figure. We don't need Freud to tell us that fathers are meant to "haunt" us, but I like to see "father Matthiessen" as a companionable, revenant ghost that continues to tease us to dare and venture into dark but luring closets, hidden but kinky secrets, and shattered but marvelous ruins. Huck Finn causing havoc at King Arthur's court. I take his legacy as a challenge to continuously question ourselves as Americanists but also as precarious individuals with our very own ghosts.

Notes

1 F. O Matthiessen, *From the Heart of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 65–6.

2 Margaret Mead, "The Salzburg Seminar on American Civilization 1947: Report to the Harvard Student Council," *Salzburg Global Seminar*, 1947, accessed August 3, 2016, https://www.salzburgglobal.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Documents/General_SGS_Documents/1947_MeadArticle.pdf.

3 Ibid.

4 Both Oliver Matthias Arnold Schmidt and George Holt Blaustein stress the important role of literature during the first few years of the Salzburg Seminar as crucial instigator of postwar cultural diplomacy in their respective Ph.D. dissertations. "American literature remained part of the core curriculum but lost the seminal role it had during the first three years," argues Schmidt, and Blaustein adds that it was the "ascendance of social science [that] matched a decline in the importance of literature and other humanities—on which, after all, the utopianness of the first years in many ways depended." Oliver Matthias Arnold Schmidt, "Civil-Empire by Co-optation: German-American Exchange Programs as Cultural Diplomacy, 1945–1961" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1999), 395; George Holt Blaustein, Jr., "To the Heart of Europe: Americanism, the Salzburg Seminar, and Cultural Diplomacy" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010), 217. I want to thank Guenter Bischof for bringing Schmidt's dissertation to my attention.

5 The first session on "American Civilization" took place from mid-July to August 1947. Richard Campbell, one of the young organizers from Harvard, articulated his aim for the seminar earlier that year: "We hope to create at least one small center in which Europeans from all countries, and of all political convictions, could meet for a month in concrete work under favorable living conditions … and to lay the foundations for a possible permanent center of intellectual discussion in Europe." In his historical account of the event, Christian Thomsen—like Margaret Mead—describes the seminar as "meeting place of cultures," where the great task "was not only to get previous enemies to sit at the same table but also to overcome the abyss of distrust that was opening up between former Eastern and Western allies." It took, as Thomson asserts, "great tact, empathy and personal stamina," and he specifically praises Matthiessen for being self-critical in his attitude towards the learning effects of American democracy. Richard Campbell quoted in Thomas H. Eliot and Lois J. Eliot, *The Salzburg Seminar: The First Forty Years* (Ipswich, MA: Ipswich Press, 1987), n. pag.; Christian W. Thomsen, *Leopoldskron: Early History, the Reinhardt Era, the Salzburg Seminar* (Siegen: Verlag Vorländer, 1983), 110–1. For further accounts of the early history of the Salzburg Seminar, see "1947: The Beginnings of Salzburg Global Seminar," *Salzburg Global Seminar*, accessed on August 2, 2016, http://www.salzburgglobal.org/about/history/foundation-of-the-salzburg-seminar.html; Marty Gecek, "Salzburg Global Seminar: 1947–2015," in *Austria and America: 20th-Century Cross-Cultural Encounters*, ed. Joshua Parker and Ralph J. Poole (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2017), 137–48; Johannes Hofinger, *Die Akte Leopoldskron: Max Reinhardt, das Schloss, Arisierung und Restitution* (Salzburg: Verlag Anton Pustet, 2005); Walter Hölbling, "Coming into View: European Re-Visions of 'America' after 1945," *American Studies International* 37, no. 2 (1999): 24–42; Timothy W. Ryback, *The Salzburg Seminar: The First Fifty Years* (Salzburg: The Salzburg Seminar, 1997).

6 Matthiessen, *From the Heart*, 12.

7 Ibid., 13–4.

8 Ibid., 14. In the Prague section of *From the Heart*, Matthiessen pleads for the inclusion of more ethnically diverse and immigrant writers. "Until now," he writes, "our immigrant groups have been studied too exclusively in terms of the problem presented by their assimilation into the dominant Anglo-Saxon society." He argues instead for "the kind of history that will trace in detail what these peoples brought with them to the new world, … to what extent they have contributed some of those values to America." Ultimately,

such a history "would enable us to know more about the rest of the world" (125–6). It also is noteworthy that his last, posthumously published, study was on Theodore Dreiser, an outsider in America with his German working-class background who joined the Communist Party in 1945. See Blaustein, "To the Heart of Europe," 268.

9 Matthiessen, *From the Heart*, 14.

10 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), 221.

11 In a long passage, Matthiessen speaks about Hanns Caspar Kollar, an Austrian who "taught me most about the possibilities of life in America" (15). With this comment admitting to the strange experience of an Austrian teaching him about American life Matthiessen quotes himself from *American Renaissance*; it is part of the dedication in which he jointly addresses Kollar and Harry Dorman from New Mexico.

12 Ibid., 65–6.

13 I find remarkable Matthiessen's educational agenda, as he speaks to the present by evoking the past. Although the seminar program emphasized contemporary rather than historical topics (especially in the social sciences), Matthiessen's choice of literature to lecture on and teach about seems astonishing: Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, James, Dreiser, and Eliot.

14 Andrew S. Gross, "'Death Is So Permanent. Drive Carefully': European Ruins and American Studies Circa 1948," in *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe (Hanover, NE: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 89.

15 I want to thank Mark Reinhardt for encouraging me to follow the traces of this particular ghost.

16 Matthiessen, *From the Heart*, 44.

17 Ibid., 45.

18 Ibid. This perspective would, of course, change in James's later life after experiencing World War I. See Dietmar Schloss, *Culture and Criticism in Henry James* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1992), 121–40.

19 Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881; New York: Penguin, 1984), 100–1. In Matthiessen, the passage reads as follows: "I had not remembered the delicately effective use that James makes here of his special kind of ghost. When Isabel asks, so lightly, at the moment of her fascinated first glimpse of Gardencourt, 'Isn't there a ghost in this romantic old castle?' Ralph responds, yes, of course there is, but it is seen only by those who have suffered much, and so he hopes that she will never see it" (45). Matthiessen thus elevated James's "romantic old house" with "no romance [t]here" to a veritable "castle." James's original text is more elaborate and verbose, stretching over close to two pages.

20 Matthiessen, *From the Heart*, 45.

21 James, *Portrait of a Lady*, 624.

22 Matthiessen, *From the Heart*, 45.

23 Ibid., 46.

24 On queer kinship in *The Portrait of a Lady*, see Dana Luciano, "Invalid Revelations: Queer Kinship in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*," *The Henry James Review* 23, no. 2

(2002): 196–217, https://doi.org/10.1353/hjr.2002.0011.

25 Matthiessen, *From the Heart*, 45.

26 Dorin Smith, "Ghosts without Depth: The Recognition of Jamesian Ghosts," *The Henry James Review* 37, no. 3 (2016): 247, https://doi.org/10.1353/hjr.2016.0020.

27 Ibid., 252.

28 Leo Marx, "The Teacher," in *The Pilot and the Passenger: Essays on Literature, Technology, and Culture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 236.

29 F. O. Matthiessen, *Henry James: The Major Phase* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), xvi.

30 Ibid.

31 Matthiessen, *From the Heart*, 22.

32 Alfred Kazin, *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment: From the Journals of Alfred Kazin* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 85.

33 Ibid., 83. On Kazin's further impressions of the 1947 seminar, see Ralph J. Poole, "'Isn't there a ghost in this romantic old castle?' American Studies at Salzburg's Schloss Leopoldskron," in *German-American Encounters in Bavaria and Beyond, 1945–2015*, ed. Birgit M. Bauridl, Ingrid Gessner, and Udo Hebel (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 103–28.

34 May Sarton, "The Pieces of This Death (for F. O. M.)," in *F. O. Matthiessen (1902–1950): A Collective Portrait*, ed. Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Huberman (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 134.

35 Ibid., 135.

36 Ibid.

37 Prov. 27:6 (NAS).

38 The novel starts right after Cavan's suicide in October 1949 when his sister is summoned to attend to her estranged brother's affairs. The narrative then moves back, as we follow several characters' last encounters with, and thoughts about, Cavan.

39 May Sarton, *Faithful are the Wounds* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 209, 141, 192.

40 Ibid., 121.

41 Ibid., 48.

42 See May Sarton, *Conversations with May Sarton*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 96, 101. In 1977, Sarton said that "*Faithful Are the Wounds* has quite a bit about marriage, though it also talks about a singular person who does live alone, the suicide, who was Matthiessen." Sarton, *Conversations*, 66. Robert K. Martin recalls asking Sarton why she chose to omit Matthiessen's homosexuality and his relation to Cheney, especially since the couple were living near Sarton in southern Maine. "Sarton's amazing response to me was," writes Martin, "that she had no idea about Matthiessen. Either she was lying or Matthiessen lived a very closeted life." Robert K. Martin, "A Dream Still Invincible? The Matthiessen Tradition," in *Whitman East and West: New Contexts for Reading Walt Whitman*, ed. Ed Folsom (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 99.

43 Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 11.

44 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham,

NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 125–6.

45 Ibid., 149.

46 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community: Theory Out of Bounds*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 92.

47 Ibid., 56.

48 Castiglia and Reed, *If Memory Serves*, 28.

49 Sarton, *Faithful*, 196–7.

50 Ibid., 220.

51 Mark D. Walhout, "F. O. Matthiessen and the Future of American Studies," *Prospects* 22 (1997): 9, 28.

52 Leo Marx, "'Double-Consciousness' and the Cultural Politics of an American Critic," in *The Pilot and the Passenger: Essays on Literature, Technology, and Culture in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 242–3.

53 Ibid., 249–50.

54 Randall Fuller summarizes the way Matthiessen's suicide in 1950 has been perceived, both immediately after his death and since then: "Matthiessen's suicide has been variously attributed to the death in 1945 of Cheney; his disappointment in his book on Henry James; the vitriol to which he was increasingly subjected in the local and national press as an unrepentant leftist intellectual during the Cold War; and lurking just below the surface of these attacks, the insinuation of his homosexuality." Randall Fuller, "Aesthetics, Politics, Homosexuality: F. O. Matthiessen and the Tragedy of the American Scholar," *American Literature* 79, no. 2 (2007): 385, https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-2007-005.

55 Irving Howe, "The Sentimental Fellow-Traveling of F. O. Matthiessen," *Partisan Review* 15 (1948): 1125.

56 "Innocent Abroad," *Time* (September 20, 1948): 114.

57 Quoted in John Rackliffe, "Notes for a Character Study," in *F. O. Matthiessen (1902–1950): A Collective Portrait*, ed. Paul M. Sweezy and Leo Hubermann (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 91–2.

58 Matthiessen's stance on communism is much more complicated than outlined here. An avowed and self-declared Christian socialist, he had strong sympathies for the communist ideal, but was highly critical of Stalinism, which may be gathered from various passages in his European travelogue; for example when he writes about "the conflict between my enduring belief in socialism and some of the grave shortcomings of the present Soviet state" (50).

59 From Matthiessen's account, there is no doubt about how much he enjoyed the session and was keen on returning the next year. Even though he was truly supportive and crucial for making the event happen, his initial incentive was to meet the Czech Secretary of State, Jan Masaryk, in Prague (10). Ironically, while the manuscript was being printed, the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia took place. Matthiessen did not—or could not—change the manuscript, but inserted a long footnote in the form of a letter of a Czech contact informing him about the distressful and alarming state of the "new" Czechoslovakia and about the suicide of Masaryk (187–9).

60 Schmidt, "Civil-Empire," 308.

61 Ibid., 309.

62 Ibid., 337. Matthiessen eventually suffered from the consequences of the report, but the CIC initially primarily targeted Clemens Heller, resulting in him being banned from attending the following year.

63 Quoted in Schmidt, "Civil-Empire," 346.

64 Smith's theme for the seminar was "The Impact of the West and the Westward Movement on American Thought in the 19th Century." On the surface, this choice seemed more politically appropriate than Matthiessen's focus on East Coast culture, but Smith viewed his topic as a vehicle to critically discuss American "'isolationism' and its companion doctrine of 'American exceptionalism.'" Quoted in Schmidt, "Civil-Empire," 362.

65 Schmidt, "Civil-Empire," 394.

66 Matthiessen to Russell Cheney, Glastonbury, April 18, 1925, in *Rat and the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney*, ed. Louis Hyde (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 124.

67 Robert Polito, "A Judgment of Art," in *A New Literary History of America*, ed. Greil Marcus and Werner Sollors (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), 564.

68 Matthiessen to Russel W. Davenport, March, 1925, in *Rat and the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney*, ed. Louis Hyde (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 18.

69 Polito, "Judgment of Art," 567–8. Likewise, Polito reads *From the Heart of Europe* as a retracing of Matthiessen's "initial travels with Cheney" (567), and he specifically highlights Mark Merlis's 1994 novel *American Studies* as an illuminating effort in unearthing how Matthiessen "made a little country of his own" (Merlis quoted in Polito 566). I draw on some of these suggestions.

70 Jonathan Arac, "F. O. Matthiessen: Authorizing an American Renaissance," *New Political Science* 7, no. 1 (1986): 28, https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148608429610.

71 Some of the revisions not cited above include: Harry Levin, "The Private Life of F. O. Matthiessen," *The New York Review of Books* (July 12, 1978): 42–6; Eric Cheyfitz, "Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*: Circumscribing the Revolution," *American Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1989): 341–61, https://doi.org/10.2307/2713029; Michael Cadden, "Engendering F. O. M.: The Private Life of *American Renaissance*," in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, ed. Joseph A. Boon and Michael Cadden (New York: Routledge, 1990), 26–35; David Bergman, *Gaiety Transfigured: Gay Self-Representation in American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 85–102; Donald E. Pease, "Negative Interpellations: From Oklahoma City to the Trilling-Matthiessen Transmission," *boundary 2* 23, no. 1 (1996): 1–33, https://doi.org/10.2307/303574; Charles E. Morris, III, "'The Responsitivities of the Critic': F. O. Matthiessen's Homosexual Palimpsest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84, no. 3 (1998): 261–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335639809384219; Jay Grossman, "The Canon in the Closet: Matthiessen's Whitman, Whitman Matthiessen," *American Literature* 70, no. 4 (1998): 799–832, https://doi.org/10.2307/2902392; Travis M. Foster, "Matthiessen's Public Privates: Homosexual Expression and the Aesthetics of Sexual Inversion," *American Literature* 78, no. 2 (2006): 235–62, https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-2006-002; Arthur Redding, "Closet, Camp, and Cold War: F. O. Matthiessen's *From the Heart of Europe*," *boundary*

2 33, no. 1 (2006): 171–201, https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-33-1-171; Nishant Shahani, "The Politics of Queer Time: Retro-Sexual Returns to the Primal Scene of American Studies," *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 4 (2008): 791–814, https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.0.1552.

72 Similarly, Colm Tóibín has claimed that Matthiessen lived two lives. In order to join them, "it would have taken heroic courage, and there was something about Matthiessen's intelligence which was deeply suspicious of the heroic. What we have are his letters and journal and his critical work: the tone of one is clearly gay (and open and loose); the tone of the other is brilliant and academic and discloses nothing, except his fear of homosexuality." Colm Tóibín, *Love in a Dark Time: Gay Lives from Wilde to Almodóvar* (New York: Picador, 2003), 13.

73 Matthiessen to Russell Cheney, Oxford, February 7, 1925, in *Rat and the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney*, ed. Louis Hyde (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 86.

74 Matthiessen to Russell Cheney, Oxford, January 29, 1925, in *Rat and the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney*, ed. Louis Hyde (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 71.

75 Matthiessen to Russell Cheney, London, September 23, 1924, in *Rat and the Devil: Journal Letters of F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney*, ed. Louis Hyde (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 29–30.

76 "There is much to be said about Matthiessen's interest in writing about women authors decades before much critical attention was focused on them," argues Joel Pfister. Joel Pfister, *Critique for What? Cultural Studies, American Studies, Left Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 222. Notably, Matthiessen's book on the James family includes a long chapter on Alice James, and he also wrote on Margaret Fuller, Emily Dickinson, and Katherine Anne Porter.

77 Polito, "Judgment of Art," 564.

78 F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), x.

79 Matthiessen quotes Whitman who remarked that "Eakins errs just a little, just a little—a little—in the direction of the flesh" (604). Nevertheless, Matthiessen links the two artists later on: "In so far as the effects of one art can approach those of another, Eakins is most like Whitman in 'The Swimming Hole,' where one of his favorite relaxations provided the material for this natural arrangement of the naked bodies of some of his students and himself against a summer landscape. . . . What would have appealed most to Whitman was the free flexible movement within the composition, and the rich physical pleasure in the outdoor scene and in the sunlight on the firmly modelled flesh. Whitman's work, in turn, approaches the powerful construction of Eakins in his sketch, 'Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,' in 'Song of Myself'" (610). In a footnote, Charles E. Morris suggests that this palimpsestic moment of placement and analysis of Eakins's painting in Matthiessen's book is a "thinly veiled piece of visual evidence" of Matthiessen's method: by alluding to the tabooed passions of "his" authors, he "indulges in his own sexually charged reading[s]." Morris, "Homosexual Palimpsest," 280.

80 Henry Abelove, *Deep Gossip* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 57–8, 63. Heide Hoechst argues that "[a]lthough Louis Hyde has edited all mention of Skull

and Bones from the published collection of the couple's letters . . ., a cross-reference of friendships and Skull and Bones membership roster reveals a nearly encompassing overlap. To maintain the secrecy of this Society, Hyde encodes fraternal membership in the collected letters with the phrases, 'close friend' and 'Yale classmate.'" Heidi Hoechst, "Refusable Pasts: Speculative Democracy, Spectator Citizens, and the Dislocation of Freedom" (PhD diss., University of California at San Diego, 2008), 112.

81 Abelove, *Deep Gossip*, 69.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., xii.

84 Ibid., xvii.

85 See Robert J. Corber, "Sentimentalizing Gay History: Mark Merlis, Alan Hollinghurst, and the Cold War Persecution of Homosexuals," *Arizona Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1999): 121, https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.1999.0005.

86 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 52–3.

87 Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 151.

88 Mark Merlis, *American Studies* (New York: Alyson Books, 1994), 86.

89 Walt Whitman, "I Dreamed in a Dream," 1867, *The Walt Whitman Archive*, ed. Ed Folsom and Kenneth Prince, accessed July 16, 2018, https://whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1867/poems/52.

90 Gross, "European Ruins," 86.

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“You know, I used to be a Jew”

Groucho Marx, Max Reinhardt, and the Transformation of American Studies

Mark Reinhardt

Abstract

Beginning with the unlikely pairing of Max Reinhardt and Groucho Marx, this article unpacks an old, politically troubling Jewish joke as a way of tracing two trajectories that unfolded between Austria and the United States. The first follows the author’s family, the second the interdisciplinary field of American studies. The joke’s commentary on the dilemmas of assimilation, as played out in the family history, frames a more sustained examination of how national identity was understood by the American studies project consolidated in Salzburg and the US just after World War II. Focusing on how the new field’s ways of engaging and occluding problems of race, subordination, exploitation, and land-theft shaped an interpretation of American democracy’s history and prospects, the article puts these issues in the context of Donald Trump’s election as president and the urgency of understanding not only the ruptures but also the historical continuities his presidency represents. Against the backdrop of those reflections, the article considers how contemporary American studies does and might engage the continuities. The field must help shape a national narrative both accessible in idiom and able to reckon with the ongoing history of white supremacy and settler colonialism. Doing that entails not only moving beyond but also borrowing anew from that early, Salzburg-style formation of American studies. It may also benefit from the Jewish joke: the conclusion and two postscripts read the joke’s limitations in the light of recent social struggles yet also note its unnerving relevance to the Trump-era resurgence of antisemitism.

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“You know, I used to be a Jew”

Groucho Marx, Max Reinhardt, and the Transformation of American Studies

Mark Reinhardt

I’ll begin with a joke. Or, rather, a story.[1] Actually, it’s a story about a joke, a true story that has, over the years, sometimes circulated as if it were just a joke and not (also) an account of a real event. Which seems fair enough: no third party witnessed the event, so judging the reliability of reports proves challenging. Anyway, although the people and circumstances involved in the telling matter to me and to our setting and occasion, the real truth, the truth upon which I want to reflect, resides in the joke itself. Now, as I should acknowledge in advance, by present lights the joke is a bit offensive. But that, too, is part of what makes it worth pondering, part of the truth conveyed to us. Or so I will eventually claim. And now that my setup is nearly as rococo as Schloss Leopoldskron, here’s the joke, told *as* a joke:

> A rich man and his hunchbacked friend are walking down a busy city street when they pass a synagogue. “You know,” the rich man says, puffing on his cigar with an air of satisfaction, “*I* used to be a Jew.” “*Yeah*?” his friend replies, “I used to be a hunchback.”

I learned the joke from my grandfather, Gottfried Reinhardt, who spent part of his childhood in Leopoldskron. He told it to me back in the seventies, in Salzburg, where my grandparents then lived and I spent formative parts of my childhood. He did so more than once: Gottfried loved to tell that joke. He never said why, but, looking back, I think I know. He’d lived through a lot, most notably the period when assimilationist Jews of the kind who had at some point imagined they were just Germans or Austrians had been taught otherwise, discovering their delusion to be as patent as the rich man’s, their identity as inescapable as his deformed companion’s. You could hear the wisdom of cruel experience in the way—at once rueful and hearty—Gottfried laughed at the punch line. My surmise is that he numbered his own father among those who’d had to learn that tragic, historical lesson.

From a certain perspective—for example, Alfred Kazin’s writing about the inaugural session of the Salzburg Seminar—Max Reinhardt was something of a parvenu.[2]

Here was a Jew who had, as a youth, Christianized his surname in order to advance his theatrical career. And when that career had advanced beyond nearly anyone's wildest dreams, he took up residence in the former home of the Archbishop, complete with its own baroque chapel, so that he could stage Catholic morality plays on the steps of the town's main church. So perhaps what made the joke so resonant to his son was how the world had taught both son and father that the father's fantasy was unsustainable.

Such were my initial reflections when, having just received an invitation to speak at my great-grandfather's house, I sought a topic suited to the conference's exploration of "The Changing Nature of American Studies." The invitation arrived less than a month after Donald Trump's inauguration as President, so untenable fantasies and cruel political lessons were much on my mind. They still are. Growing up with the joke's insights prompts one to take the dangers of Trump and Trumpism very seriously. So, I have asked myself, what does taking them seriously mean for American studies? What lessons and fantasies must we examine? Here, I'll pursue a three-part answer. First, I will revisit the joke, unpacking it further by developing a stylized contrast between the two Jewish entertainers named in my title. Second, in their company and in light of the Trump ascendancy, I'll reflect on the founding of American studies in Salzburg and its echoes in the United States. Finally, against that backdrop, I'll briefly discuss some opportunities and challenges facing our field now.

A Few Jews

The joke has any number of minor variations. Some cast the rich man as a Jew who has formally converted to Christianity. Then, the convert may walk by a synagogue or instead pass an Episcopal church. Most tellings are set in the United States, but Fritz Stern remembers one from his Weimar childhood featuring two Germans on holiday in Italy.[3] Thanks to the power of Google searches to sift a culture's flotsam and jetsam, I've even found a rare version that substitutes Catholics for Jews, replacing a punch line on the futility of sloughing off Jewishiness with one on the impossibility of shaking feelings of religious guilt.[4] No variation, however, is as common as the basic form with which I began. As best as I can tell, its currency derives from Groucho Marx, who on various occasions recounted it in live public performances. And here the plot thickens: Groucho offered up the final quip not as one of his own, carefully polished zingers but, rather, as part of a story about an actual encounter, one that had been reported by others as well. In Manhattan early in the twentieth century, it turns out, a rich man really did walk by a temple and tell his deformed companion that he used to be a Jew, and really was greeted with the retort, "I used to be a hunchback." It's the self-professed hunchback, the humorist and performer Marshall P. Wilder, who first

told the story, implicitly praising his own perspicacity and wit while explicitly lampooning the social pretensions of his friend, the financier Otto Kahn.[5] Groucho knew a good comeback when he heard one, but surely one reason why he liked recounting the story was that he had, himself—and famously—lampooned Kahn, whom he knew. *Animal Crackers* (musical 1928; film 1930) satirizes Kahn in the character Roscoe Chandler, a fabulously rich and pompously refined American art collector eventually unmasked as, in reality, Abie the fish peddler from Czechoslovakia.[6] Chandler, in other words, used to be a Jew, too.

When first proposing a topic to present in Salzburg, all I knew about the joke was my grandfather's telling and a provenance having something vaguely to do with Groucho. Discovering the fuller history, I felt a shock of recognition. Otto Kahn knew not only Groucho but also Max Reinhardt. A leading American patron of the arts in the first half of the twentieth century, Kahn was, indeed, one of the main backers of Reinhardt's US ventures. He was an early visitor (and eventually a donor) to the Salzburg festival and a guest at Schloss Leopoldskron.[7] So, in Kahn, Max Reinhardt and Groucho Marx shared a relationship to the man whose relation to his own Jewishness became first a witty story, then a Broadway musical and film comedy, and finally a more anonymized joke that offers us something of a parable about history and identity. Perhaps that's enough to justify spending a moment thinking about Marx and Reinhardt together.

In doing so, I'll have to beg your indulgence. Max Reinhardt died long before I was born. I'm a scholar of neither theater history nor Austria and Germany. I can't read any German more complicated than a restaurant menu. What follows is thus made of inference, conjecture, unsystematic reading in English, and a perhaps idiosyncratic interpretation of family lore. But as some of that lore concerns Leopoldskron, let's begin there.

Max Reinhardt set some of his plays and performances amidst Leopoldkron's buildings and grounds. But the locale was also itself the most elaborate production of his career, with sets featuring mirrors and panels from Venice and a library from Sankt Gallen. We're too late for the parties, at least his parties, but we know they were legendary.[8] Sources of allure and envy, invitations were highly sought-after. The guests included the glitterati of at least two continents. Commoners and aristocrats, actors and bankers, poets and politicians numbered among the dramatis personae—according to Max Reinhardt's inventory, even Jews and Nazis mingled together on some occasions.[9] Gottfried characterizes his father as shy and not altogether comfortable amidst the social swirl. The actor turned director often hovered at the fringes.[10] Still, Max brought to the reconstruction of this house and the parties he held there the many talents of one of history's greatest directors of spectacles.

Stefan Zweig understood the effects. Once Reinhardt and Hoffmanstahl descended on Salzburg, he wrote, the world took notice and, "all of a sudden I was living in my home town and at the same time in the middle of Europe."[11] Zweig's work illuminates the Leopoldskron gatherings in other ways, too. He makes vivid the cultural world of which Reinhardt's theater was a resplendent, perhaps even culminating example. Lovingly, nostalgically, and from the inside, Zweig reveals how powerfully the quest for fame drove young, ambitious Viennese Jews in the Empire's final decades. (Most of what the world celebrates as Viennese, he remarks, is specifically Jewish.[12]) For these men and women of talent, he shows, the archetype was the great actor, the quest for fame part of a culture in which theater had an unmatched importance.[13] Hannah Arendt, herself a Jewish refugee, recoiled from Zweig's sketch: condemning the "unpolitical point of view" of which he boasted, she judged his world a gilded cage. But although sharing none of Zweig's nostalgia, she found his portrait accurate. She aptly characterized the strivings he chronicled as "the attempt to transform fame into a social atmosphere, to create a caste of famous men like a caste of aristocrats, to organize a society of the renowned."[14] In that society, aspirants hoped, the limitations of birth or Jewishness would fade, as old identification papers were discarded for the new credentials available to those whose genius had won recognition. We can see, at the very least, elements of that history of aspiration in the society of the renowned created after 1918 at Leopoldskron, with its extraordinary atmosphere of fame.

I have only scraps—some photos and a few books—from Max Reinhardt's Leopoldskron. I wish I could, even for a moment, step back into its atmosphere. But part of me would also like to bring Groucho Marx along. To the society of the famous we might contrast his credo, "I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member." Both the remark's occasion and motivating sentiments are disputed, but they also don't matter. Whatever the facts, the quote has become representative because it fits so well with Groucho as a comedic character speaking from the position Lee Siegel calls "Archimedean outsiderness."[15] When Groucho infiltrates high society, he soon enough undoes everything around him, puncturing ambitions, conventions, status, and their accompanying solemnity. Think of Margaret Dumont, her faith in established order and procedures providing the foil for his merciless mockery.[16] And while the gender dynamics of that pairing may, like the Kahn story, play more problematically for us today, Dumont hardly stands alone: in a Marx Brothers movie, male authority figures—bankers, philanthropists, college presidents, and their ilk—all get cut down to size, too. The Marx Brothers' deflationary treatment, like Zweig's cult of genius, offers a specifically Jewish response to an experience of social marginality, but the two responses differ wildly. In the great Marx Brothers movies, as Irving Howe once put it, "the disassembled world is treated with total disrespect,

an attitude close to the traditional feeling of Jews that the whole elaborate structure of gentile power is merely trivial."[17] For all the differences of place, time, and tone, the effect is not all that far removed from the one Arendt, in the same period as her reflections on Zweig, attributed to Heine: "It is no longer the outcast pariah who appears the schlemiel, but those who live in the ordered ranks of society."[18]

What can we glean from this? Perhaps counterposing a historical person to a fictional character, and the Austria and Germany of the teens and twenties to thirties and forties America is unfair. May anyone, anywhere, save a movie set or TV studio, *really* behave like Groucho? Mockery, too, has political limits. Some actors weather it better than Roscoe Chandler. Sometimes the "structure of gentile power" is vastly more durable and dangerous than in a Marx Brothers film. No skepticism of the atmosphere of genius would have enabled my great-grandfather to resist the storm blowing from paradise; no matter what, he'd have ended his days in American exile.[19]

But I draw the comparison to underscore the challenge he confronted, not to pass judgment or give in to the easy condescension of hindsight. More than a whiff of that condescension wafts through Alfred Kazin's comments on Leopoldskron and the man who had brought it back to life while helping to transform the city of Salzburg. Kazin calls Reinhardt a Gatsby.[20] Both too harsh and too simple, his verdict trivializes and psychologizes what is better understood as a story of historical and political limits. He misses the context of the artistic project in which Reinhardt participated when helping to build, in the Festspiele, an institution that continues to flourish, even now. In a way, Reinhardt inverted Zweig. While the latter thought the world mistook for Viennese a culture created in the main by Jews, my great-grandfather, although also a Viennese Jew—one who, as a careful observer will note when visiting Leopoldskron's library, installed a Star of David in the grillwork—saw his medium, theater, as distinctively Austrian, because wherever he looked in his homeland, he saw theatricality.[21]

It's easy to grasp why the Catholic Baroque, with what he called its fusion of exaltation and sensuous appeal,[22] captivated a man of his sensibility, to see what Catholic churches "as a scene" provided that he felt neither Protestant churches nor even synagogues could,[23] and what Salzburg, in particular, offered him as stage and set. How could the man whose *Midsummer Night's Dream* in Los Angeles would feature a torch parade down the Hollywood Hills resist a *Jedermann* in the Domplatz? As an Austrian, however, he understood directing his plays at the Festspiele not only as expressing his own dramatic vision but also, and thereby, as participating in a national project, for as assorted historians have shown, in the First Republic, the Baroque provided one key idiom of reconstruction and collective identification

amidst the chaos following the Great War, and like many other assimilated Jews of the era, Reinhardt sought to contribute to the project and lay claim to the identity.[24] Not everyone, of course, welcomed his use of the idiom. Like Hoffmanstahl, Reinhardt, or, as the antisemitic press liked to call him, "Goldmann-Reinhardt," faced critics who believed that any virtuosity he displayed must be empty and decadent. For them, he—someone of his *kind*—could only present his material mechanically, soullessly, in an ersatz rendering.[25] The tradition he saw as national, hence his birthright, something he could revive and revise, turned out to be too particular to have room for the likes of him. Fame was not enough to secure his claim as an Austrian.

All this is what I now think lay behind my grandfather's proclivity for telling me a joke that underscored the social and political constraints on self-invention and assimilation. Am I being fanciful? Would he validate my reading of his family history? I'm not sure. But I know that the story of how my grandfather and great-grandfather became American citizens is also the story of how Leopoldskron passed simultaneously out of their hands and into the purview of American studies, becoming an emotionally fraught part of the Jewish immigrant experience in the United States and, at least for me and my siblings, an American as well as an Austrian place. (Whenever I open a volume from the small shelf in my Massachusetts home that holds my great-grandfather's books, I see in the front matter the proprietary stamp the Nazi government applied after seizing Leopoldskron for state purposes in 1939. In such jarring moments, time and space scramble; his house is in a sense in mine, and I in his.[26]) I believe unpacking the joke in relation to this family history helps me read the American landscape now.

American Studies

This is a scary time in the United States, not only at the level of law and policy but also for the affects and attitudes, styles and sensibilities coursing through the body politic. When using the present article's title in the conference proposal I submitted to the AAAS, I could not know that, months later, white supremacists would rally around the statue of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, that neo-Nazis would lead the crowd of the ultimately murderous gathering in chants of "Jews will not replace us," or that the President would find "some very fine people" among the rally's participants.[27] I suppose two lessons of the joke from which my title derives are "Don't be surprised" and "Don't take this lightly." When a leader links resentments over race, immigration, and shifts in sexual and gender norms to economic anxieties and grievances, making them resonate together while attacking the independent press and denying the legitimacy of his opponents, it's a mistake to assume that either minority rights or democratic commitments will endure.

But the joke's main lesson for American studies in the Trumpian moment is probably not about American Jews, who, as a group, largely passed long ago into the safe space of whiteness and whose individual lives, even after Charlottesville, seem less inflected by prejudice than in earlier eras.[28] The period since Trump's election has witnessed a jump in individual acts of antisemitic harassment and violence in the United States today,[29] as seen in the thirty-seven percent increase in antisemitic hate crimes reported to the FBI in 2017.[30] But these, however terrible and terrifying, still remain isolated events, and the kinds of broad social barriers which limited careers and aspirations for Jews born before the Second World War have crumbled. Rather, the lesson on which I focus concerns how the risks now facing other, considerably more marginal and vulnerable populations fit within the long arc of American history—how to understand material structures of subordination and identify what space is available, for whom, in prevailing narratives of nationhood and popular idioms of belonging and historical memory. Facing a president whose campaign slogan had the widely understood (if often disavowed) meaning, "Make America White Again," drawing energy from how some sectors of the electorate felt about the candidate's Black predecessor, Americanists must confront not only the ruptures but also the deep historical continuities Trump's victory represents. One fitting way is to consider how analogous problems were engaged or evaded by the American studies project as consolidated, in Salzburg and elsewhere, just after the war.

Opening the first Salzburg Seminar, F. O. Matthiessen proclaimed, "We have come here to enact anew the chief function of culture and humanism, to bring man into communication with man."[31] The terms seem musty now, but they name a hope both urgent and grand. Amidst economic and political crises, the need to build democratic institutions was palpable. That reconstruction could be furthered by "scholars familiar with the present state of knowledge and opinion in American universities," as Henry Nash Smith wrote in *American Quarterly*, seemed plausible to many.[32] What could be more fruitful than bringing students divided by nationality, experience, and political commitment together in seminars taught by academic luminaries? Consider the fruits, as they grow today: like the Festspiele, the undertaking begun in Salzburg in 1947 obviously continues to thrive, both in the institutions of the Salzburg Global Seminar and in the association sponsoring this journal.

I won't presume to weigh the institutions' accomplishments or trace their histories, since so many readers will know more than I do about both. Rather, I will probe some limits to the approach to democracy and Americanness in the work of some of the Seminar's early figures because they illuminate our field's contours in a crucial conjuncture. I focus on limits despite all that was extraordinary about these men, women, and their work, and without assuming that what we easily see now could have been as clear to everyone then. The point of the exercise, again, is merely

to sharpen perceptions of the challenges that should matter to us. Underscoring where we've been may help us consider where we're going.

Return for a moment to Smith's brief account of the Seminar. That it appeared in *American Quarterly*'s inaugural issue reveals the intimate ties between Austrian beginnings and the legitimation of American studies as a distinct field in the United States. It thus gives us a window onto "official" American studies at a founding moment. In his article, the Seminar's importance as an international encounter comes through clearly enough, but, particularly compared to the intensity one finds in the first-hand reports of Matthiessen and Kazin, Smith's account of the Seminar's democratic pedagogy seems fuzzy and anodyne. The American instructors, he writes, displayed a freedom new to European students, for instance in "asserting that the Supreme Court had made a mistake in handing down a certain decision, or that the Negro is unjustly treated in the United States."[33] Far better than propaganda, he continues, freedom of criticism taught European participants the nature of American democracy—and in doing *that*, the Seminar "has restated concretely the ideal, the potential unity (not of course the homogeneity) of Occidental culture."[34]

Smith has a point. It matters that there was criticism, in a context where some may have found its forms novel or surprising. Still, and even setting aside the ways in which a kind of bounded criticism may function as the most effective propaganda of all, it's worth lingering over Smith's language, and not only for the fatuous pomposity of invoking the "unity of … Occidental culture" so soon after the nightmare of what was, after all, *Western* fascism. It would be anachronistic not to acknowledge that "the Negro has been unjustly treated" was an inflammatory statement in certain American precincts at the time (just as, sadly, it would be naïve to overlook how this appears to be the case in, indeed even a cause of, the Trumpian ascendency), but it would also be obtuse not to see the difference between the remark Smith lauds and a curriculum putting the historic expropriation of African American labor and appropriation of native land at the center of an analysis of the history of American democracy and the making of American culture. Writing in a small compass, the author can, of course, do only so much; reporting on a fledgling and fragile institution in a zone occupied by the American army, who had only grudgingly abandoned an attempt to require that Seminar instructors be certified as "politically reliable,"[35] may have induced him to find some things better left unsaid. But then, it's also worth emphasizing how, one year later and at far greater length, Smith would evade the very same issues in *Virgin Land* (1950), the book that made his career and helped launch the "Myth and Symbol" school that provided the newly consolidated field of American studies with its first quasi-official methodology.

Nowhere is that clearer than when he engages Frederick Jackson Turner's foundational essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893). It's fascinating, today, to see how Smith puts his newly fashioned critical tools to work. When Turner writes that, in the United States, "democracy is born of free land," Smith observes how the text has shifted "from the plane of the economist's abstractions, to the plane of metaphor, even of myth—for the American forest has become almost an enchanted wood."[36] Without quite realizing what he is saying or doing, Turner was thus constructing a myth not just of empty land, but also of nature. Smith's argument here is informative both for how it lays bare a transubstantiation crucial to Turner's essay and for how it occludes forces enabling that process. On some level, Smith obviously knows and even says that the very idea of "virgin" land is wholly mythic, a skewed rendering of a continent that was in fact peopled all along. He even makes one late, passing reference to the "European exploitation of native peoples all over the world."[37] Yet this observation is nowhere integrated into his analyses of myth or symbol. For instance, the rendering of Indians as symbol, their ideological and mythological categorization as nature, one of the central operations of Turner's text, is something Smith does not trace. *Virgin Land* gives meaningful consideration neither to the project of driving native peoples from their lands nor to the way the endless thirst for land shaped myth and was, in turn, legitimated by the very myths at the book's center.

The use of the myth of nature to aid land theft had been long understood by indigenous peoples and recognized even by sympathetic whites in the first half of the nineteenth century. Consider how in 1829, amidst the debate over Cherokee removal, Jeremiah Evarts had satirically, but accurately, characterized white justifications for re-settlement:

> [You] had no business to betake yourselves to an agricultural life. It is a downright imposition on us. This is the very thing that we complain of. The more you work on land, the more unwilling you are to leave it. Just so it is with your schools; they only serve to attach you more strongly to your country. It is all designed to keep us, the people of a sovereign and independent State, from the enjoyment of our just rights. We must refer you to the law of nations again, which declares that populous countries, whose inhabitants live by agriculture, have a right to take the lands of hunters and apply them to better use.[38]

In the circular logic Evarts exposes, indigenous people must yield because they are nomadic—that is, part of nature—and are all the more undeserving when they violate that nature and root themselves in the soil. The organizing metaphors are all identified in *Virgin Land*, but not the argument they authorized and that put them to work. Smith presents myths of settlement stripped of their settler colonial character, so that the violence of settlement, and the centrality of displacement and

appropriation, are less explicit than in the work of Turner himself.

Now, if the point is to look at a founding moment for American studies as a field, then I am singling out the Founding Father easiest to criticize along such lines. That, due to a report from the US Army's intelligence service, Smith's teacher, F. O. Matthiessen, was barred from returning to Austria to teach after the Seminar's first year offers evidence of how the latter challenged—and by extension the young field and new Seminar could challenge—limits on political dissent.[39] A man of the left and a searching, subtle, and original critic, Matthiessen should not be treated dismissively, though as Ralph Poole notes, he often has been.[40] As Poole shows in his contribution to this issue, *American Renaissance* (1941) offers attentive readers a sly queering of the very national canon it helped form.[41] *From the Heart of Europe* (1948) displays generosity and courage, resisting the emerging Cold War. But for all insights and avenues his works opened, even Matthiessen did not give sustained scrutiny to the kinds of constitutive violence and exclusion that concern me here.[42]

Nor, though also of a more acerbic temperament than Smith, did Alfred Kazin. Matthiessen and Kazin were certainly critics of American nationalism and racism, but Andrew Gross is right to note that both are "extremely vague" about the history and contours of the problems in the United States, "avoiding the analysis of particular instants of oppression for a more general analysis of alienation and mass society."[43] Kazin's writing about his time in Salzburg viscerally engages the problem of antisemitism. Reflecting bitterly on both the country in which he sojourned and the young American soldiers occupying it, he thought the devastations wrought by fascism and the war required the project of recovering "America as idea."[44] But that idea was purified unhelpfully, romanticized even, detached from its relationship to the nation's founding, and enduring, violence. In a manner comparable, as Phillip Gleason observes, to Gunnar Myrdal's then-new *An American Dilemma* (1944), a work of different sensibility but similar limitations, Kazin saw a problem that could be grasped as a tension between a noble creed and an imperfect practice.[45] He did not present, and there is no evidence that the inaugural session of the Seminar scrutinized, a more complicated, mutually *constitutive*, relation between the structural inequality and violence marking American national development and founding ideas.

Indeed, particularly if one bears Smith in mind, Kazin's language sometimes seems, if unwittingly, to intensify enduring forms of violence through his very articulation of the idea, as when, in his journal a decade after his time in Salzburg, he writes, "America as an idea, as a civilization, is founded on the very idea of immigration, on the idea of a world-civilization and a world frontier."[46] Even leaving aside how Kazin reinscribes the frontier, or how, precisely, he understood "world-civilization," one wonders where his idea leaves those who traveled to the American shore

bound in chains, via the middle passage, let alone those living on the land millennia before Europeans and Africans arrived. The problem inheres in the idiom of immigration. Consider Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's widely cited observation, "Settlers are not immigrants." As they explain, "Immigrants are beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they migrate to. Settlers become the law, supplanting Indigenous laws and epistemologies."[47] What would the Salzburg Seminar have looked like had its initial sessions framed the United States as "A Settler State," casting colonialism as ongoing? The question may prove impossible to answer, as the counterfactual bursts the limits of plausibility, but my remarks below nevertheless aim to make the query more than purely rhetorical.

Now What?

Much of my story about the Seminar should feel familiar. I've drawn on insights from many literatures and moments in the unfolding of the American studies project.[48] The familiarity highlights a danger. In their guide to the field, Philip Deloria and Alexander Olson bemoan the way "each generation of scholars" in American studies ends up "characterizing earlier disciplinary norms as repressive, only to themselves come under critique later in their careers." While this can reflect the development of new critical insights and commitments, they argue, it can also "become a cycle of rote critique that purges historiographical and institutional memory and forces young scholars to reinvent the wheel when usable pasts—complicated ones, to be sure—sit somewhere close at hand."[49] How could what I've said avoid those pitfalls? How might we think about the limitations of the work I've discussed while also seeking a more usable past? In response, I offer five simple comments and lines of reflection.

First, a clarification: It may seem that I have pulled a bait and switch, beginning with a joke directing us toward a *future* about which we're willfully blind, and here targeting founding figures in American studies for willful blindness regarding past violence. But both the joke and the story I've told concern failures to navigate the *present* due to a limited grasp on the enduring structures of oppression, their related fantasies, and how the unfolding of structures and fantasies over time shapes lives as past projects into future. Deloria and Olson help us understand how the temporalities overlap.[50]

Second, an admission: Even granting how Matthiessen and Kazin offer a critical edge missing from Smith's work, I've excluded important cases. Had my Salzburg figure been John Hope Franklin, who came a few years later, the story would have to change somewhat. If I moved further afield and took W. E. B. DuBois or C. L. R. James as touchstones for critical thinking in the era, the tale would differ more profoundly still. But that would not be a recounting that stayed within the contours of Amer-

ican studies as it was being consolidated in the American academy at the time of the Salzburg Seminar and the founding of *American Quarterly*. Reckoning with what those contours encompassed and left out remains crucial.

Third, however, a qualification: To assert subjection's constitutive role in American democracy, tracing how the former has both drawn support from and informed what Kazin called "the American idea," is not to prescribe the parade of horribles as the only valid genre of American studies scholarship. Nothing good for our work can come from always and reflexively dismissing aspirational rhetoric as mere hokum. The difficult challenge is to understand how conquest, subordination, and empire are entangled with emancipatory yearnings and ideals in multi-layered relations not well-captured by pitting noble idea against imperfect reality, on the one hand, or emphasizing a merely exterminist political theology, on the other. Much of the best work flowing from, for instance, the transnationalist, feminist, queer, and critical race currents in American studies models the kind of inquiry such engagements require.[51]

But insofar as that may go without saying, now, I would add, fourth, a recuperation. My stress on theoretical and political limits hardly renders worthless the work done in early forms of the American studies project and their Leopoldskron incarnation. The Salzburg authors offer our own time models of scholarly analysis in a more public idiom. An odd dynamic has marked much of the past generation or two of American studies work: Insights and commitments born of the struggles of insurgent social movements have entered the field amidst the steady march of professionalization and specialization. Radical claims about American cultural forms and identities, or their entanglements in empire and relation to transnational circuits are thus sometimes articulated in language less demotic, and in that sense less democratic, than the writing of Alfred Kazin or even Henry Nash Smith. The former, in particular, participated in the consolidation of a field while consciously resisting both the blandness and the jargon of specialized disciplinary writing.

The events in the streets of Charlottesville, the re-branding of white supremacy as "white nationalism," the impassioned defense of Confederate monuments, and the kind of "historical analysis" offered when General John Kelly, Chief of Staff to the President of the United States, bemoaned the Civil War's origins in "the lack of an ability to compromise"—all indicate how much power the most retrograde national narratives retain.[52] Treating that durability as a mere failure of information or knowledge would be ingenuous, academic in the most pejorative sense. General Kelly's commentary was a tactical move in the short-term news cycle, and even insofar as it rested on ignorance, that ignorance was willed or motivated, what Freud calls "disavowal" and Baldwin names "innocence,"[53] its failures a matter less of knowledge

than acknowledgment.[54] Still, Kelly's pernicious foray into history had enabling cultural conditions, which the field must fight to transform. These include the authority and resonance of assorted received histories. Given the powers, interests, and identifications involved, altering national narratives is no easy task. But though not sufficient, it's necessary to making certain kinds of political changes. Whether the recent removals of Confederate monuments make for good short-term electoral politics is unclear, but in the longer view, rendering the historical defenses of commemoration literally incredible remains an essential political and intellectual task. Here, the earlier reach for a more public idiom for an American studies intervention into American stories is worth emulating.

Whose stories? Fifth, bearing that question in mind, I end with a worry and a challenge. Despite periodically mentioning the transnational, writing for an Austrian journal makes me aware of how much a national focus—perhaps, viewed from afar, a parochially American set of preoccupations—dominates the latter half of this article. The call for intervention I just made is civic as well as scholarly. Living where I do, I am preoccupied right now with what animates those whose thoughts, feelings, and acts might (I fear) deepen and extend, or (I hope) resist, then end the Trumpian moment. I can't not write as an aggrieved and alarmed US citizen. But though accurate, that answer isn't wholly satisfying, not least for raising a difficulty I have no wish to obscure or set aside. Lurking in my remarks may lie some disavowed model of inclusion, a project of making right long-standing injustices by making equal citizenship real for all. Although such a project would overcome some of the shortcomings of the American studies project exemplified by the early Seminar, it would exacerbate others. For like the idea of "a nation of immigrants," the ideal of inclusive citizenship enables a violent erasure of some lives and histories.

As the exemplary work of Native American and indigenous studies scholars such as Audra Simpson, Jodi Byrd, Joanne Barker, and Glen Coulthard emphasizes, for native peoples citizenship is often not a solution but the name of their problem.[55] When bestowed unilaterally, as in the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, it has served as a means for eroding collective bonds, dividing communities and limiting power, undercutting indigenous sovereignty while simultaneously rendering some indigenous persons "aliens" in parts of their homelands.[56] As Simpson's brilliant account of the Mohawk Nation at Kahnawà:ke demonstrates, those caught between an unsought form of citizenship and an unwanted alien status may respond not through the struggle for recognition but with assorted practices of refusal. The Mohawks of Kahnawà:ke, she writes, "insist on being and acting as peoples who belong to a nation other than the United States or Canada. Their political form predates and survives 'conquest'; it is tangible (albeit strangulated by colonial governmentality) and is tied to sovereign practices . . . [T]hey *know this*. They refuse to *let go of this knowledge*."[57]

Working through the implications of this knowledge is among the most important directions in which American studies is heading, though the journey calls into radical question the "we" or "you" who are going. What a democratic resolution means when the boundaries of the demos are contested in this way poses questions as deep and difficult as they are urgent. I proffer no answers here, claiming no privileged insight. I have no wish to cast myself as the settler intellectual who, by blending "decolonical thought with Western critical traditions," proves "superior to both" and, like "the escapee from Plato's cave," laments that he sees what no one else can.[58] I do not see. Many of the key issues, which continue to cleave indigenous communities, are not for me, or any member of a settler majority, to work out. Yet some are urgent for American studies as a field. We will need, I imagine, to learn to think in new ways about nested and overlapping sovereignty, alternate belongings, reconfigured citizenships, matters on which indigenous studies and struggles will almost certainly provide the crucial impetus. And those needs seem a fitting ending: for all of the ways in which they lie beyond the ken of the Jewish joke with which I began, and for all of its limits, it pertains even to these struggles, because it is, at its core, about how fraught and complex belonging can be.

Who's Laughing Now?

In concluding, I want to keep my opening promise and—finally—acknowledge how and why the joke is problematic, and what that might suggest to us. In order to puncture the misrecognition of comfortably assimilated Jews by underscoring what is permanent and inescapable, the joke ends with a term that has deservedly fallen into ill repute. That we owe the original story's punch line to the man it characterizes marks the distance between his moment and ours. Rendered as a joke, at least, the punch line is one that, were it not for its very specific connections to the topic at hand and the venue in which I first presented it, I'd be unwilling to deliver in a large, formal gathering, let alone in print. In the United States, the noun "hunchback" is now considered derogatory, a harsh way of naming severe kyphosis and reducing a person to an affliction. This linguistic shift didn't just happen. It's a very small instance of the large changes wrought by more than a generation of disability activism and the related rise of disability studies.[59] Because of those changes, using the derogatory term for comic effect would now, in progressive circles, seem all too close to the grotesque manner in which Donald Trump, on the campaign trail in the summer of 2016, imitated a disabled reporter for the *New York Times*. So, just as Jewishness in the United States feels less precarious than at the time when Otto Kahn got his comeuppance from Marshall Wilder, the barriers and prejudices facing the disabled have been confronted, leading to transformations, however imperfect and incomplete, in law, in the built environment, and in the way some disabilities signify.

American studies has long had something to say about those shifts in the terms of identity and difference, those moments of resignification, and about the struggles that make them possible. At its best, our field captures the joke's enduring kernel of insight, namely how risky it is to minimize or misread enduring prejudices and structures of oppression, while also repudiating the joke's reductive essentialism, its excessive confidence about what can or can't be altered. Both the legacy of the American studies project that began in Salzburg and the dangerous political forces shaping the American present suggest some of the shifts and struggles we must pursue going forward.

Postscript

When are we in danger of minimizing enduring prejudice, and when do claims that prejudice will persist express not insight but essentialism? It's often too soon to know. This, too, is part of the joke's pertinence. I received a reminder during the Leopoldskron gathering. The morning after my keynote address, I awoke to an email from a friend urging me to view an attached video clip. Watching the video, I discovered that, only five hours after my remarks (which had included the previous paragraph), the comedian, Larry David delivered the opening monologue on *Saturday Night Live*. Following a few remarks about his early, desperate years working in New York, David launched a sketch—incorporating a grotesque miming of deformity—in which a vulgar Quasimodo unrealistically demands to date "only the best-looking woman in Paris." After segueing to an extended riff on how prominent #MeToo cases have heightened his own anxiety over gentiles' views of Jews and thus, of course, himself, David ended with a routine about how he would have handled the dating dilemmas facing Jewish men in the concentration camps.[60] Taken as a whole, the monologue suggests that, though perhaps attenuated, the links between Jewishness and deformity persist in the American cultural imagination, links David, likening himself to Quasimodo, invited viewers to confront. The dominant response to his performance underscores the distance disability activism still has to travel: the skit swiftly became notorious, but whereas cries of outrage over the Holocaust joke resounded in the mainstream press,[61] the hunchback routine drew few comments. The work of resignification continues, then; the struggles the field must engage are far from over.

P.P.S.: The (Not-So?) Repressed Returns … Again

On Saturday, October 27, 2018, a man wielding an assault rifle entered Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue and opened fire, killing eleven people—by most accounts, the deadliest attack on Jews in American history. Forced by the event to ask, again,

how to steer between understating and essentializing prejudice, I can only repeat, mournfully, "It's often too soon to know." Months earlier, I had submitted what both the journal's guest editors and I considered the present article's final version. But the massacre and resulting commentary left me uneasy about my portrait of Jews' status in the Trump era, and I asked permission to make changes. Above, I described Jews as having entered "the safe space of whiteness." I am letting the line stand, and have scarcely altered the surrounding paragraph, for they still capture how American social categories bear on many Jews much of the time. The barriers that once impeded Jewish career aspirations have not returned. But Pittsburgh exposed complexities my account obscured. I'll end with them.

When Jeff Sessions, then the Attorney General, denounced the shooting as "an attack on all people of faith,"[62] the phrasing infuriated me—and not only because Sessions used the tragedy to reiterate his specious claim that "religious liberty" is under assault in the United States. Sessions also failed to acknowledge that the killer, who reportedly yelled, "All Jews must die" as he entered the temple,[63] murdered his Jewish victims *as Jews*. Yet even acknowledging that obvious fact would not suffice, because characterizing the victims as killed for their Jewish "faith" misrepresents modern antisemitism. The Pittsburgh attacker *racialized* his victims. He had company—in the United States, as in Europe, the most organized and active hate groups make the essential, heritable alienness of Jews central to their ideologies, entangling Jew-hatred with hostility to Black and Brown peoples. Those chanting "Jews will not replace us" in Charlottesville invoked an imagined Jewish conspiracy to foster immigration and race-mixing. The Pittsburgh murderer was driven by the theory that wealthy Jews were behind the caravan of Central American refugees then making its way toward the US border in search of a safe haven.[64] And although such fantasies are most frequent in the cesspools of "alt-right" websites and social media, they are hardly confined to the fringes of American political discourse. They also emanate from the centers of power, as when a guest on *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, broadcast nationally on the Fox Business Network, referred to the "Soros-occupied State Department" or when the American president, emulating Viktor Orbán, himself linked Soros to the caravan.[65] And it was Trump, after all, whose final TV ad of the 2016 election showed images of prominent Jews (Soros among them) while the candidate's voiceover railed against "a global power structure that is responsible for the economic decisions that have robbed our working class, stripped our country of its wealth and put that money into the pockets of a handful of large corporations and political entities."[66] That the Pittsburgh shooter saw even Trump as controlled by Jewish interests excuses no one. However rare or isolated the shooting, the ideology behind it remains part of the American cultural atmosphere.

I confess to feeling surprised to find myself writing this postscript—surprised

events made the writing necessary. I suspect my grandfather would respond to my surprise with his hearty-rueful laugh. Perhaps I did not listen to his joke as carefully as I thought I had. American studies might listen further, too.

Notes

1 This article began as a talk at the seventieth anniversary of the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, celebrated by the Austrian Association for American Studies at Schloss Leopoldskron, in Salzburg. Writing not only for the occasion but also about the setting, I conceived of the talk as a site-specific work. Revising the talk, this article extends the analysis of the history and current challenges of American studies as a transnational field. Because the underlying argument takes inspiration from the family history discussed in the opening section, however, I have left that portion largely intact, preserving the lecture's informality and references to Leopoldskron as immediate surround.

2 Alfred Kazin, "Salzburg: Seminar in the Ruins," *Commentary* (July 1948): 62. Ralph Poole's fine work on the seminar drew Kazin's article to my attention. Ralph Poole, "'Isn't there a ghost in this romantic old castle?' American Studies at Salzburg's Schloss Leopoldskron," in *German-American Encounters in Bavaria and Beyond, 1945–2015*, ed. Birgit M. Bauridl, Ingrid Gessner, and Udo Hebel (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 103–28.

3 Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 99.

4 Greg Callaghan, "10 Questions—Mikey Robins," *The Australian*, July 2, 2011, https://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/questions-mikey-robins/news-story/ced9a5686960ae3ed34ccce0bca8f0e4.

5 Theresa Collins, *Otto Kahn: Art, Money, and Modern Time* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 261. Collins, Kahn's biographer, is among the many who tell the story—but her supporting footnote cites Groucho's Carnegie Hall performance. In light of the reliance on Groucho, and especially given Stern's German variation, a tough-minded empiricist may question the reliability of the claims that the single origin is the Kahn-Wilder encounter. But Groucho isn't the only source. For example, Theodor Reik reported decades earlier that the Kahn-Wilder story "is told in New York" (90). In any event, it is so often reported as a true story that I am content, for my purposes, to treat it as one. Theodor Reik, *Jewish Wit* (New York: Gamut Press, 1962).

6 Written by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, *Animal Crackers* was a 1928 musical starring the Marx Brothers and Margaret Dumont, all of whom again starred in the 1930 film version directed by Victor Heerman. It is widely considered one of the best of the Marx Brothers films.

7 Lisa Silverman, "Max Reinhardt between Yiddish Theatre and the Salzburg Festival," in *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theatre*, ed. Jeanette R. Malkin and Freddie Rokem (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 212; Collins, *Otto Kahn*, 2, 175, 304.

8 Christian W. Thomson, *Leopoldskron* (Siegen: Verlag Vorländer, 1982), 45.

9 Gottfried Reinhardt, *The Genius: A Memoir of Max Reinhardt* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 163.

10 Ibid., 27.

11 Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, trans. Anthea Bell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 371.

12 Ibid., 43–4.

13 In *The World of Yesterday*, Zweig, for example, writes that "In an actor at the imperial theatre, spectators saw an example of the way to dress, enter a room, make conversation, were shown which words a man of taste might use and which should be avoided" (36). Similarly, Max Reinhardt wrote, "The old Imperial Vienna was a theatre city unlike any other . . . And the actors dominated Vienna." Quoted in Martin Esslin, "Max Reinhardt: 'High Priest of Theatricality,'" *The Drama Review: TDR* 21, no 2 (1977): 6, https://doi.org/10.2307/1145120.

14 Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 318, 325. My reading of Zweig's book is indebted to Arendt's commentary. Given that the latter is a searing critique, it's worth noting that Arendt, no Austrian, uses language similar to Zweig and Reinhardt in describing the unique centrality of the theater and the actor among Viennese (322).

15 Lee Siegel, *Groucho Marx: The Comedy of Existence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 122.

16 Margaret Dumont served as foil to the Marx Brothers in several stage productions and seven of their films (including both versions of *Animal Crackers*). From production to production, she played essentially the same character, a wealthy, uptight, widow and socialite, wooed (opportunistically) but also relentlessly (and gleefully) humiliated by Groucho.

17 Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 567.

18 Arendt, *Jewish Writings*, 279.

19 I invoke Walter Benjamin's great phrase in his ninth thesis on the philosophy of history. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 392.

20 Kazin, "Salzburg," 62.

21 Michael Steinberg makes the point that theater was "essentially Austrian" for Reinhardt (47). In his 1917 memorandum proposing the building of a festival theater in Salzburg, Reinhardt himself referred to "the special talents of the Austrian peoples" in theatrical arts (3). Similar sentiments come through in Reinhardt's remarks collected by Oliver Sayler. Michael P. Steinberg, *The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival: Austria as Theater and Ideology, 1890–1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Max Reinhard, *A Festival in Salzburg* (Salzburg: Salzburg Festival, 2017); Oliver Sayler, *Max Reinhardt and His Theater* (New York: Brentano's, 1924).

22 See Sayler, *Max Reinhardt*, 66.

23 Reinhardt, *The Genius*, 24.

24 See Steinberg, *The Meaning*; Silverman, "Max Reinhardt"; Michael Patterson, "Populism versus Elitism in Max Reinhardt's Austrian Productions of the 1920s," in *The Great Tradition and its Legacy: The Evolution of Dramatic and Musical Theater in Austria and*

Central Europe, ed. Michael Cherlin, Halina Filipowicz, and Richard L. Rudolph (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 72–81.

25 See Steinberg, *The Meaning*, 166; Silverman, "Max Reinhardt," 212; Andres Müry, "Xenophobia," in *Das große Welttheater: 90 Jahre Salzburger Festspiele* (Salzburg: Salzburg Festival, 2010), 84–5.

26 Well before the founding of the Salzburg Seminar, then, Leopoldskron became a site of American studies in the sense I am characterizing, and would have lived on as one for my generation of my family even had the Seminar never come into existence.

27 Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman, "Trump Gives White Supremacists an Unequivocal Boost," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/trump-charlottesville-white-nationalists.html.

28 I qualify my language for two reasons. First, even accepting the problematical historical settlement by which, at least, Ashkenazi Jews in America became understood as "white" over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, obviously not all Jews in America fit that description. The experiences and status of some Sephardim proved different, and of course, Jewishness hardly makes African American or Latinx Jews socially white. Second, however, there are reasons to wonder about the whiteness settlement itself. I address these in this article's postscript.

29 Jaleed Kaleem, "Anti-Semitism in U.S. Surged in 2017, a New Report Finds," *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-anti-semitism-adl-20180226-story.html.

30 Francie Diep, "Anti-Black and Anti-Semitic Attacks Top the FBI's 2017 Records for Hate Crimes," *Pacific Standard*, November 13, 2018, https://psmag.com/news/anti-black-and-anti-semitic-attacks-top-the-fbis-2017-records-for-hate-crimes.

31 F. O. Matthiessen, *From the Heart of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 13.

32 Henry Nash Smith, "The Salzburg Seminar," *American Quarterly* 1, no.1 (1949): 34, https://doi.org/10.2307/3031250.

33 Ibid., 36.

34 Ibid., 37.

35 Thomas H. Eliot and Lois J. Eliot, *The Salzburg Seminar: The First Forty Years* (Ipswich, MA: Ipswich Press, 1987), 29.

36 Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 253.

37 Ibid., 257.

38 Jeremiah Evarts, *Essays on the Present Crisis in the Condition of the American Indians; First Published in the National Intelligencer Under the Signature of William Penn* (Boston, MA: Perkins & Marvin, 1829), 55–6. I was first drawn to this passage by the excellent commentary of Alison McQueen and Burke A. Hendrix. My remarks are indebted to their analysis. Alison McQueen and Burke A. Hendrix, "Tocqueville in Jacksonian Context: American Expansionism and Discourses of Indian Nomadism in Democracy in America," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017): 671, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717000895.

39 Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, trans. Diana Wolf (Chapel Hill: Uni-

versity of North Carolina Press, 1994), 165.

40 Poole, "'Isn't there a ghost,'" 106–7.

41 Ralph J. Poole, "'Huck Finn at King Arthur's Court': F. O. Matthiessen, the Salzburg Seminar, and American Studies," *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–26, https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v1i1.70.

42 Poole's subtle, insightful reading shows that it's not quite right to say that Matthiessen ignored fundamental exclusions, insofar as the latter's work teased out alternatives to, and put pressure on, what would later be called heteronormativity. But Matthiessen's story of America does not engage the dimensions of subordination that concern me in this article.

43 Andrew S. Gross, "'Death is So Permanent. Drive Carefully.': European Ruins and American Studies Circa 1948," in *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck and Donald Pease (Hanover, NE: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 91.

44 Quoted in Phillip Gleason, "World War II and the Development of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (1984): 345, https://doi.org/10.2307/2712737.

45 Gleason, "World War II," 352.

46 Alfred Kazin, *Alfred Kazin's Journals*, ed. Richard Cook (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 205.

47 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 6–7, https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630.

48 In addition to Gleason, Gross, and Poole, one could consult many efforts to engage the history of the field by practitioners of the "New American Studies" during the 1990s and early 2000s.

49 Philip J. Deloria and Alexander I. Olson, *American Studies: A User's Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 100.

50 I thank my colleague Jeff Israel for conversation about this.

51 Consider, to take just two examples from among many, Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) and the late José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

52 Maggie Astor, "John Kelly Pins Civil War on 'Lack of Ability to Compromise,'" *The New York Times*, October 31, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/us/john-kelly-civil-war.html.

53. Sigmund Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization: An Interpolation into the Theory of Sexuality," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 19:* The Ego and the Id *and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson, ed. James Strachey (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 143; James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 6.

54 I take my sense of acknowledgment from Stanley Cavell. See, in particular, Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Consider, specifically, his analysis of how "the recognition of the other's specific relation to oneself" requires "the revelation of oneself as having denied or distorted that relation" (428, 338). On this, and its relationship to both Baldwin and psy-

choanalysis, see also George Shulman, "Acknowledgment and Disavowal as an Idiom for Theorizing Politics," *Theory & Event* 14, no. 1 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2011.0003.

55 Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

56 Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 134–7.

57 Ibid., 2.

58 Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization," 16.

59 See, for example, Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

60 Larry David, "Stand-Up Monologue," *Saturday Night Live*, season 43, episode 6, *YouTube*, November 4, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0eeNijdv3I.

61 See, for example, Debra Birnbaum, "Larry David Criticized for 'SNL' Jokes About Holocaust," *Variety*, November 5, 2017, https://variety.com/2017/tv/news/larry-david-snl-monologue-holocaust-1202607500/.

62 Quoted in Matt Stout, "Speaking in Boston, Jeff Session Says He May Pursue Death Penalty Against Pittsburgh Shooter," *The Boston Globe*, October 29, 2018, https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/10/29/jeff-sessions-says-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooter-could-subjected-death-penalty/SHPESIzsolwW4l7ASXv9GK/story.html.

63 Barri Weiss, "A Massacre in the Heart of Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2018, http://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/opinion/synagogue-shooting-pittsburgh.html.

64 Tara Isabella Burton, "The Centuries-Old History of Jewish 'Puppet-Master' Conspiracy Theories," *Vox*, November 2, 2018, http://www.vox.com/2018/11/2/15946556/antisemitism-enlightenment-george-soros-conspiracy-theory-globalist.

65 Josh Marshall, "A Country Awash in Fox's Dark Toxins," *Talking Points Memo*, October 28, 2018, https://talkingpointsmemo.com/edblog/a-country-awash-in-foxs-dark-toxins.

66 Daniel Politi, "Is Donald Trump's Closing Campaign Ad Anti-Semitic?" *Slate*, November 6, 2016, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/11/is-donald-trumps-closing-campaign-ad-anti-semitic.html.

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What We Imagine Knowledge to Be

Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and Seventy Years of American Studies

Philip McGowan

Abstract

This essay looks back to 1947, the year that the Salzburg seminar was inaugurated, as well as looking at contemporary issues in American studies to chart where we have come from to date and where the field is heading. Its main argument examines the poems "Esthétique du Mal" by Wallace Stevens from his 1947 collection Transport to Summer and "At the Fishhouses" by Elizabeth Bishop, first published in 1947, and explores common themes of knowledge, pain, loss, and history. As the Western world experiences again a moment of political and cultural uncertainty brought to the center stage of US and European discourse in 2016 by the election of Donald Trump and the UK vote to leave the European Union, Stevens and Bishop offer routes forward through such moments of heightened politicization. American studies, as a field of interconnected disciplines, continually confronts the difficult aspects of twentieth- and twenty-first-century life. As the rise of the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements have indicated, the open ruptures within American society will continue to pour forth debates requiring urgent critical attention and discussion. Incidents of racial hatred, of right-wing extremism, and of abusive misogynistic sexism, dormant to varying degrees prior to Trump's election, have come to the surface of a nation increasingly riven by what the reality of his Presidency means for America. Our job, as researchers and teachers, is to engage each and every aspect of this moment in history, however contested or controversial they may be.

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What We Imagine Knowledge to Be

Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and Seventy Years of American Studies

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Taking its title from a line in Elizabeth Bishop's 1947 poem "At the Fishhouses," the narrative of which details a trip back to the Nova Scotian environments of her childhood, this article (re-)establishes imagination and knowledge as two modes of response to a fractured or uncertain world. At the opening of the 2017 Austrian Association for American Studies conference, Ralph Poole's keynote "Huck Finn at King Arthur's Court: F. O. Matthiessen, the Salzburg Seminar, and American Studies" offered an agile and intricate reading of F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James, and the figurative and actual ghosts that were circulating both in post-World War II Salzburg and also in James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881).[1] What Poole so cogently developed permits this discussion to build on a number of shared themes: in particular, questions of suffering, innocence, and experience are uppermost in my mind. Recall the conversation in *The Portrait of a Lady* between Isabel Archer and Ralph Touchett concerning the failure of ghosts to appear to innocents such as Isabel herself. Using 1947 as the temporal point of significance (because it was the year of the first Salzburg Seminar), what follows examines how two American poems negotiate the themes of suffering, innocence, and experience during and immediately after the war in Europe. Both poems are written by American poets firmly ensconced within the United States. The first, "Esthétique du Mal" by Wallace Stevens, was written and published in 1944. One of Stevens's "greater poems of the Second World War,"[2] its fifteen cantos reveal an "openly apocalyptic" Stevens,[3] and are a key moment in his 1947 collection *Transport to Summer*. The second poem, Bishop's "At the Fishhouses," first published in *The New Yorker* on August 9, 1947, although not immediately concerned with the events of the recent war, is a work that offers resolution after rupture from a writer well versed in personal and familial dislocation.

Following Poole's identification of Matthiessen's own issues with dislocation,

identity and belonging, I want to connect my readings of these Stevens and Bishop poems back to Matthiessen and the project of American studies that he helped inaugurate here in Salzburg in the summer of 1947. Such a backward glance over traveled roads allows a self-reflexive consideration of the state of the field of our interests today: by tallying where we have come from previously, particularly out of the immediate shadows of World War II, we can begin to speculate where American studies might be headed at this point nineteen years into the twenty-first century. The myriad fields that now constitute American studies have expanded beyond all recognition when compared to 1947, and the continual redefinition of the territories of American studies is central to what maintains its relevance as an academic discipline. Our field is the cultural barometer of contemporary events and phenomena that are insistently transnational as well as being multiply transformative. That said, the close of 2017 brought with it ominous echoes and historical reminders of that earlier time period, seventy years previously, out of which Europe, led by interventionist US initiatives in foreign and educational policy, was taking preliminary steps after World War II.

As a field of academic inquiry, American studies occupies and negotiates numerous sites of contention and rupture. 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. American studies, for me, continually interprets what it is that we imagine knowledge to be: American studies questions, qualifies, and layers received interpretations with new nodes of evaluation and new identities requiring fair and equal representation. That said, and speaking from my own central interest in American poetry, American studies is a broad enough school that is capable of retaining individual disciplinary focus when needed and of applying such scholarly insights to the questions that confront contemporary scholars and citizens. It is for this reason that I turn to the work of two established American poets to speak about then and now and to return the value and vitality of poetry and poetry criticism to the heart of European negotiations of the United States. Bishop's work in particular is filled with questions of transnationalism and transgression, her art the slow distillation of answers to questions that we still seek to resolve. To take just one example: the title poem of her 1965 collection *Questions of Travel* closes

> *"Is it lack of imagination that makes us come*
> *to imagined places, not just stay at home?*
> *Or could Pascal have been not entirely right*
> *about just sitting quietly in one's room?*

Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?"[4]

One primary mode of Bishop's writing is that of resistance: to received wisdom, to conditioned behaviors, to poetry's own articulations of "imaginary gardens" as Marianne Moore might have represented a similar point.[5] In "Questions of Travel," first published in *The New Yorker* on January 21, 1956, Bishop interrogates the meaning of place, what one understands as "home" or defines as belonging, set against the background of her own life by this time relocated from North America to Brazil. Matthiessen, dead almost six years before Bishop's poem was first published, might well have asked such questions about his own imagined places (indeed, this very place, Salzburg, in 1947)—about belonging, and home, and choices that are never wide nor free.

Three months before delivering the inaugural Salzburg seminar lecture, F. O. Matthiessen reviewed Wallace Stevens's *Transport to Summer*, the volume that contains "Esthétique du Mal," for *The New York Times*. This was Stevens's fifth poetry collection, or sixth if the 1931 expanded reissue of *Harmonium* constitutes a separate volume. Matthiessen's review, published on April 20, 1947, reveals some of the concerns that were pre-occupying his mind in the lead-up to his Salzburg address. Reading it again today provides a working background against which the threads of this essay will begin to take form. A number of issues happily coalesce for the purposes of this analysis: Matthiessen reviewing Stevens's latest collection; the fact that Matthiessen then comes to Salzburg in the summer of 1947; and the summer publication of Bishop's "At the Fishhouses." Examining "Esthétique du Mal" and "At the Fishhouses" together may seem to be a somewhat arbitrary partnership, but it should be noted that Bishop's initial explorations in poetry were influenced in no small measure by the work of Stevens: "I think that Wallace Stevens was the poet who most affected my writing then," Bishop observed in a 1966 interview with Ashley Brown when discussing her early writing as a student at Vassar College.[6]

Taking these two poets, and these two specific poems, as the central coordinates for this argument's reflection on our current moment, I want to consider where American studies (however we might define this multivalent, flexible academic territory) might be headed in this age of political rupture on both sides of the Atlantic. So much has changed, and mainly for the better, in the seventy years that have passed since the first Salzburg seminar; and yet so much appears in flux once more, no matter where we might turn to look: the regional uncertainty in Catalunya in the autumn of 2017, for instance; or the lead-up to, and actual moment and outcome of, the 2018 mid-terms in the United States (what forms of fake news will attempt to

occupy both the headlines and the electorate, distracting from what might actually be going on in America's political system between now and the 2020 Presidential election campaign); tensions on the Korean peninsula in 2017 have made the specter of a cataclysmic nuclear confrontation depressingly real once again all of a sudden; allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election has, since May 2017, seen the establishment of the Mueller Special Counsel investigation into the election campaign; and the European project of integration, that has assured peace across continental Europe since the end of WWII, is again on the negotiating table due to the UK's open wound, its decision to leave the European Union following its June 23, 2016, referendum. In this (hopefully short) "post-truth" era, Bishop's delineation of what we imagine knowledge to be serves as a necessary and also rejuvenative counter-balance to a western world apparently keen on undoing the advantages it has accrued since 1945, seemingly devoid once again of rational thought processes and simultaneously blind to historical perspective.

First, to Matthiessen and his review of Stevens. Having noted the "full-bodied" nature of Stevens's *Transport to Summer* poems and how the poet was, like the later Yeats, turning more to examine "the imagination itself," Matthiessen concludes his *New York Times* review of Stevens's latest collection by noting:

> All of Stevens' later work has been written against the realization that we live in a time of violent disorder. The most profound challenge in his poems is his confidence that even in such a time, even on the verge of ruin, a man can recreate afresh his world out of the unfailing utilization of his inner resources. The value of the creative imagination, of "supreme fictions" in their fullest abundance, lies in the extension, even to the point of grandeur, that they add to our common lives. I suppose that Wallace Stevens, in expressing such truths with the mellowness and tang of a late-summer wine, has about one reader to every hundred of the latest best-seller. Yet Stevens, who did not publish a poem until he was 35, will increasingly be recognized to belong in the company of Henry Adams and Henry James, with that small body of important American artists who have ripened as they matured, and who have been far more productive beyond their middle years than during their green twenties or thirties.[7]

Matthiessen's prediction that Stevens would come to hold a prominent place in the American literary canon was certainly well-judged. However, here, I'm more interested in his tethering of Stevens's work to the contemporary moment of WWII, an issue of immediate importance to Matthiessen's lecture at Salzburg in July 1947, in which he emphasized that

> [o]ur age has had no escape from an awareness of history. Much of that history has been hard and full of suffering. But now we have the luxury of an historical awareness of another sort, of an occasion not of anxiety but of promise.

> We may speak without exaggeration of this occasion as historic, since we have come here to enact anew the chief function of culture and humanism, to bring man again into communication with man.[8]

Matthiessen's pinpointing of historical awareness is key and guides what I want to do with these poems by Stevens and Bishop. Writing to Leonard C. van Geyzel in September 1939, Stevens admits his response to the start of the war in Europe as being "a horror of it: a horror of the fact that such a thing could occur."[9] In a follow-up letter to van Geyzel from January of 1940 Stevens references "the more or less universal disaster" of the war,[10] and in a series of letters as the war progresses, Stevens makes clear the heightened reality of the events and the effect of these on his mind. In August of 1940, writing to Henry Church, to whom Stevens dedicated "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1942), Stevens reveals two recent family tragedies—"My only brother died a month or two ago, and last week my wife's mother was killed in an automobile accident"—which, added to the wider "demnition news" and the "demnition grind at the office … makes me feel pretty much as a man must feel in a shelter waiting for the bombing to start." His overall take on current affairs is that "the climate is changing, and it seems pretty clearly to be becoming less and less a climate of literature."[11]

Confirming Matthiessen's observation that "Stevens' later work has been written against the realization that we live in a time of violent disorder,"[12] the collection before *Transport to Summer*, *Parts of a World* (1942) had concluded with two notable discussions of war and aesthetic responses to it, the poem "Examination of the Hero in a Time of War" and what Charles Berger has termed a "curious prose coda" which opens, "The immense poetry of war and the poetry of a work of the imagination are two different things."[13] In the latter, Stevens argues that "[i]n the presence of the violent reality of war, consciousness takes the place of the imagination. And consciousness of an immense war is a consciousness of fact."[14] The tussle with reality, with facts as they are, is one aspect of Stevens's "poetry of a work of the imagination"; during warfare, the excess of real facts overpowers the imagination. Poetry, as a consequence, inevitably provides an altered response to things as they are. As Simon Critchley delineates it, "in the violent reality of war, consciousness takes the place of the imagination": war is the enactment of what Stevens would later refer to as "A new knowledge of reality" in "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself," the poem that closes *The Rock* (1954).[15] War is not simply an imagining of what such a knowledge might be but its realization in the present moment.

By the time he sends "Esthétique du Mal" to *Kenyon Review* editor John Crowe Ransom, on July 28, 1944, Stevens notes in his accompanying letter that the poem's "title is not quite right in the sense that anything of that sort seems to be not quite

right now-a-days" and that the aesthetics he refers to is "the equivalent of apercus, which seems to have been the original meaning."[16] Indeed, elsewhere, Stevens confessed to feeling equivocal about aspects of the poem. Writing to Church in August 1944, he admits "[e]very now and then as I walk along the street I think of something that I said in the course of it that I wish I hadn't said, but it doesn't matter."[17] The overall trajectory of *Transport to Summer*—and recall Stevens is aged sixty-seven at the time of its release—is one that maps a writer looking for elements beyond the immediate war and post-war environments to facilitate a piecing (back) together of a more benign worldview. Not that Stevens had avoided warfare as a subject in his poetry prior to WWII: his first poems emerge in 1914 and, as Rachel Galvin notes, an early work like "Phases," published in Poetry in May 1914, developed a "trope of music" that would be "crucial to all his subsequent war poems."[18] Later poems such as "Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz" (1935) continue Stevens's employment of music as a martial metaphor and prefigure the "unbelievable catastrophe" that would envelop Europe after September 1939: the "sudden mobs of men" of that poem "crying without knowing for what" form part of an "epic of disbelief" that "will soon be constant."[19] In addition, Charles Berger delineates "The Man with the Blue Guitar" and "The Men That Are Falling," both contained in *The Man With the Blue Guitar* (1937), as examples of Stevens as "a civilian witness to war—not a direct sufferer of its horrors—who, while acknowledging the ethical distance between himself and the immediate victims of war, nonetheless regards it as the duty of the modern secular poet to fashion a response to what he witnesses, even from a distance."[20]

Stevens's search for an accommodation with contemporary reality during wartime might readily be discerned from the title of the opening poem of *Transport to Summer*, "God is Good. It is a Beautiful Night," or from the knowledge of the next poem, "Certain Phenomena of Sound," that now "It is safe to sleep to a sound that time brings back."[21] Thirteen poems further along in the collection, "Holiday in Reality" argues that "Spring is umbilical or else it is not spring. / Spring is the truth of spring or nothing, a waste, a fake."[22] Each of these three poems was first published during America's involvement in the war: "Certain Phenomena of Sound" in *Poetry* in October 1942; "God is Good. It is a Beautiful Night" in the December 1942 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*; and "Holiday in Reality" in the summer 1944 edition of *Chimera*. With the war over, the ten-section "Credences of Summer," completed in July 1946, anchors a shift toward positivity after brutality that characterizes a lot, though not all, of the collection: with "all fools slaughtered" and summer roses full "with a weight / Of fragrance," an environment in which "the mind lays by its trouble" is possible once more.[23] Berger for one notes "Credences of Summer" as a "dark pastoral" among Stevens's postwar works in which he "broods on the spiritual and cultural aftermath of war."[24] This collection navigates a series of interconnected terrains with war as a

central coordinate within the poems' interwoven geographies of violence and relief.

It was between 1936 and 1947 that Stevens wrote and published the bulk of his (major) works: *Ideas of Order* (1936), *The Man With the Blue Guitar*, *Parts of a World*, and *Transport to Summer*. These years were marked by the build-up to, and the devastating events of, WWII and Stevens's collections in this period negotiate these facts as key determinants of reality in his poetic universe. But Stevens did not stop there: as 1947 was drawing to a close, he was already composing more poems that would be collected in *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950). Indeed, that collection's title poem offers a daunting worldview in the wake of the nuclear aurorae created by the atomic detonations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thus, while Stevens is often read in relation to questions of abstraction, the seasons, and the power of the imagination, re-positioning the majority of his output in parallel with the brutalities and horrors of warfare allows for a range of other, potentially productive, interpretations. While actual conflict may have been held at a distance, the effects and aftermath of warfare are continuing parts of the Stevensian poetic world.

"Esthétique du Mal," a 346-line poem, was written over six weeks in 1944 in response to an American soldier's letter in the Spring 1944 edition of the *Kenyon Review*. The soldier had asked:

> What *are* we after in poetry? Or, more exactly, what are we attempting to rout? The commandos of contemporary literature are having little to do with Eliot and even poets of charming distemper like Wallace Stevens (for whom we all developed considerable passion). Not necessarily a poetry of time and place, either. The question of poetry as in life (and in the Army) is one of survival . . . Men like Karl Shapiro (his "Anxiety," in *Chimera* recently, is notable), John Berryman, Delmore Schwartz transcend the aesthetic of poetry—thank God! I find the poetry in *Kenyon Review* lamentable in many ways because it is cut off from pain. It is intellectual and it is fine, but it never reveals muscle and nerve. It does not really matter whether poetry of men in war, or suffering the impact of communiqués, has a large or small "frame of reference." It must, I feel, promise survival for all who are worth retrieving—it must communicate a lot of existence; an overwhelming desire to go on . . .[25]

Stevens worked on what a response could be, noting in a letter to John Crowe Ransom in the middle of June 1944: "What particularly interested me was the letter from one of your correspondents about the relation between poetry and what he called pain. Whatever he may mean, it might be interesting to try to do an esthétique du mal. It is the kind of idea that is difficult to shake off."[26]

Stevens's poem initially works out from instances of pain as part of the human experience, either historically due to the eruptions of Mount Vesuvius, or more con-

temporaneously in terms of the war in Europe, viewed from the perspective of the American solider, in Naples, "writing letters home / And, between his letters, reading paragraphs / On the sublime."[27] It balances evil as an entity both willed (by the human will and by abuse of power) as well as unwitting (the operations of the natural world know nothing of our existence and miseries) with what aesthetics can do as a response. Should there be, is there any division between aesthetics and ethics? Does poetry, or art more generally, have a moral role to play in our world?

Mount Vesuvius provides an ideal backdrop for Stevens's enquiries, offering an immediate historical awareness of the potential for devastation. Vesuvius's last major eruption came in March 1944, seven months after the allied invasion of Italy, and immediately before Stevens writes "Esthétique du Mal." Prior to that, its major eruptions had come in 1872 and, of course, in A.D. 79 when its destructive lava flow destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum, killing an estimated 30,000 people. The 1944 eruption claimed twenty-six Italian civilian lives, displaced 12,000 more and also accounted for twenty-five million dollars' worth of damage to US military bombers stationed in the town of Terzigno, on the eastern side of the mountain. So, Stevens's poem opens in the aftermath of site-specific natural devastation set within a larger context of human devastation wrought by the now-five-year war. Stevens writes into the opening lines considerations of place (both home and away), warfare (both as generalized and location-specific phenomena), the potential for volcanic eruptions, thoughts on the sublime, and the distillation of pain as a constant, as an historic event in memory, and as the consummation of life:

> He was at Naples writing letters home
> And, between his letters, reading paragraphs
> On the sublime. Vesuvius had groaned
> For a month. It was pleasant to be sitting there,
> With the sultriest fulgurations, flickering
> Cast corners in the glass. He could describe
> The terror of the sound because the sound
> Was ancient. He tried to remember the phrases: pain
> Audible at noon, pain torturing itself,
> Pain killing pain on the very point of pain.
> The volcano trembled in another ether,
> As the body trembles at the end of life.[28]

A central fact of wartime, and existence more generally, for Stevens is suffering, and pain: "Pain is human," we hear, and that "Life is a bitter aspic."[29] Pain is a construction of the human experience, not of the natural world: "Vesuvius might consume/ In solid fire the utmost earth and know/No pain."[30] With humans taken out of the equation, deliberations of and comparisons of pain and suffering would be nullified.

Moreover, the world is indifferent to how we feel about it: "It is pain that is indifferent to the sky," writes Stevens, who in section III posits the idea that it is Christianity that has created its own problems here by creating and believing in "an over-human god" who suffers as we suffer, sharing our mortal condition out of "sympathy."[31]

If God as a concept is removed from our view of things, so too then must Satan be removed—good and evil are not impulses external to us, but part of us, and with "the phantoms . . . gone" as "shaken realist[s]," we see reality on its own terms.[32] In the face of this, and of the issues of evil and war in our lifetime, we must remember that a heaven elsewhere that we might desire is an unreal, "non-physical" idea where spirits yearn to be part of this world:

> Perhaps,
> After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,
> Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe
> The green corn gleaming and experience
> The minor of what we feel.[33]

The lack we feel is one we ourselves have created by our failure to live, fully, in the world as it is, "Completely physical in a physical world."[34] Indeed,

> The greatest poverty is not to live
> In a physical world, to feel that one's desire
> Is too difficult to tell from despair.[35]

For Stevens, an aesthetics of now would be true to that now, emphasizing the physical and not the metaphysical, yearn not for what is past or what might happen after death: these are both unknowable now in this world, mere descriptions without places. The world of this poem is one of current pain created by current people and needs a response to it from someone who can see the world as it is, for what it is—such "muscle and nerve" as demanded by the soldier correspondent will provide a route toward truth.

Turning to Bishop, her aesthetics of now in 1947, for the purposes of this analysis, are centered in "At the Fishhouses." What she produces is a more textured and much more complexly interwoven awareness of the physical and metaphysical concerns than Stevens's poem offers. Hers is at once familial, geographical, religiously inflected (by Christianity like Stevens's poem), comical, and, ultimately, historical in its sweep of concerns which, initially, concentrate on fishhouses on a Nova Scotian shoreline. Pain features in the poem both as physical fact and as a metaphysical experience common to humans. Bishop's very difficult childhood, well documented across Bishop criticism, was divided between both Nova Scotia and Massachusetts; a Guggenheim Fellowship in April 1947 allowed her to return to the former, the locale

of her maternal grandparents, one result of which is this particular poem, an apparently quite simplistic and straightforward narrative of a shoreline scene. Warfare is not even a vibration within the poem's immediate environments; indeed, it does not feature as a primary issue across her work, although another Massachusetts poem about familial and personal rupture, "In the Waiting Room" (1971), does have World War I as part of its textural backdrop. As far as WWII was concerned, Bishop did have first-hand experience of American military preparations for the conflicts in Asia and Europe: Key West, Florida (also a favorite haunt of Wallace Stevens), where Bishop was living in the fall and winter of 1941, was rapidly rearranged as a naval base to house fifteen thousand servicemen in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.[36] Given Bishop's career-long habit of working relatively slowly on a small number of collections, however, the immediacy of contemporary world events is not readily self-evident in her poetry. Indeed, writing to Anne Stevenson in March 1963, she remarks that "it is odd how I often feel myself to be a late-late Post World War I generation-member, rather than a member of the Post World War II generation. Perhaps the Key West years also had something to do with it."[37] Whatever the explanation, her writing generally, and "At the Fishhouses" in particular, speaks to transhistorical issues positioning poetry as the optimal access mode to knowledge and truth beyond the particular circumstances of the moment.

Readers familiar with Bishop will know that there is a lot to see and pay attention to in her poetry. "At the Fishhouses" is a particularly important example of a technique that emphasizes the importance of visual perception. How we see the world and what we see are two critical components in Bishop's work; there is arguably a certain symmetry to the fact that her wartime experience in Key West included a five-day stint working in the navy's "Optical Shop" "taking binoculars apart & putting them back together again."[38] Anne Stevenson, who produced the first critical study of Bishop, notes how Bishop "believed that what matters in art is 'seeing things.' She was a word painter, the look of things isolated her from the confessional craze."[39] A word painter, and a capable painter, Bishop was also keenly interested in cinema and the visual arts, and her long descriptive stanzas in "At the Fishhouses" produce an effect that is simultaneously forensic (in its care and attention to specific detail) and photographic (in its heightened visual awareness). Her technique insistently calls attention to itself as one technique that depends on looking, and then looking again. For example, the poem "The Monument" from her first collection *North & South* (1946) asks in its opening line "Now can you see the monument?"[40] Hence, the poem questions both what is seen and how it is seen. As Linda Anderson notes, not only did Bishop identify with the art of "the provisional"; her interest in "the more conceptual aspects of writing . . . and exploring the ways in which visibility is plural, subject to multiple points of view and encounters, challeng[ed] the limits of repre-

sentation."[41] To take a closer look, which Bishop encourages readers to do continually, to pay attention to things as they are, their very materiality, their visual existence, and from this work toward what these things might possibly mean: these are the activities in which Bishop engages readers in "At the Fishhouses."

What is seen in this poem? And what might any of it mean? In terms of factual detail, there are five fishhouses; an old man nets a fishing net; there are also wheelbarrows, a wooden capstan, gangplanks, Lucky Strike cigarettes, a seal; and, increasingly as the poem tells its narrative, water. Given that it is evening and the overpowering smell of codfish is so pervasive, seeing clearly is not immediately possible, though Bishop's careful detailing of the old man, his vest covered in fish scales, his knife, and the "silver" sea allows readers to imagine that vision here has not been hampered by the gathering dusk or the fact that "The air smells so strong of codfish / it makes one's nose run and one's eyes water."[42] Coming closely on the heels of the poem's actually equivocal presentation of the visual—the sea is "opaque" and the silver that covers so much of the scene is "an apparent translucence"—are physical and then metaphysical interactions with the natural environments of this Nova Scotian fishing village. From out of the waters arises a seal to whom the poem's speaker sings Baptist hymns, namely "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"; and, by dipping your hand into the waters, the speaker suggests that the sensation would be akin to burning ("your hand would burn") because of the nature of this particular body of water which is likened to "a transmutation of fire." The experience of this water that burns is one of pain; it is also "like what we imagine knowledge to be," Bishop providing a run of adjectives ("dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free") that multiply and consequently disperse the potential ways of accommodating such knowledge within language.[43] The poem closes drawing speaker and reader alike away from the specifics of herring and codfish, Lucky Strikes and Baptist hymns out into a consideration of how we know what it is we know. Given that "our knowledge is historical," Bishop connects poem, poet and audience to an understanding of reality that transcends the present moment incorporating its specifics within the movements of history which, as Jameson famously instructs, "is what hurts."[44] Furthermore, to recount this scene of a "gloaming almost invisible," Bishop bridges the distance that opens between experience and the description of it with lists of adjectives and repeated items and phrases—herring, the herring boat, herring scales, Christmas trees that are "waiting for Christmas," the seal returning "evening after evening," and the water that is "flowing and drawn," "flowing and flown"—thus providing readers with what we imagine is there, even if initial perception of it is obscured, opaque, uncertain.[45]

Unlike Stevens's "Esthétique du Mal," the guiding concern of this poem is not (the recent) war. Reading Bishop's correspondence from during and after WWII, the war as a subject is singularly absent as an issue. Despite initial consternation at how Key

West was "terribly overcrowded and noisy … and not a bit like itself. It is one of those things one can't resent, of course, because it's all necessary,"[46] Bishop sidesteps the fact of the war and its aftermath to concentrate on other matters of immediate concern to her, whether that be travel to Mexico in 1942 or to Nova Scotia in 1946 and 1947; or the success of her own writing and that of her correspondents, in particular Marianne Moore and, from 1947, Robert Lowell. More recently, Lorrie Goldensohn has added to critical knowledge of Bishop's thinking at the time of composition by concentrating on Bishop's letters to her analyst Ruth Foster from February 1947. As a result, Goldensohn suggests that the source for "At the Fishhouses" was not the Nova Scotian setting that is detailed so meticulously in the poem but rather unconscious thoughts that Bishop admits to having about Foster. Bishop herself concluded that "knowledge is historical, besides being a random thought, I wrote down yrs ago also refers obviously to the process of psychoanalysis I know."[47] In another letter, to U.T. and Joseph Summers in July 1955, Bishop claims that "[q]uite a few lines of 'At the Fishhouses' came to me in a dream, and the scene—which was real enough, I'd recently been there—but the old man and the conversation, etc., were all in a later dream."[48] The Foster letters also reference a dream "in which everything was very wild & dark & stormy and you [Foster] were in it feeding me from your breast" and connect the appearance of the seal with Dr. Foster or, more accurately, Bishop's unconscious perception of Dr. Foster.[49] The scene in Nova Scotia is, then, "real enough" but the poem's narrative about the water, and particularly the seal, relocates readers into a parallel sphere where the unconscious reveals its power to imagine as well as produce what knowledge might be, whether painful or otherwise.

The difficulties of Bishop's life, begun in infancy and carried into adulthood and which were demonstrated at one level by her issues with alcohol dependence, coalesce in "At the Fishhouses," as the surface detail of the poem's narrative gives way to increasingly submerged, and possibly surreal, meanings. For a poem that had initially appeared to offer certainty, further readings multiply its possible meanings, leaving us in an uncertain intermediate position between the poem and its ultimate Meaning. On this journey toward some sense of revelation, or at least re-formation of this specific scene, Bishop moves us along from the physical into the metaphysical, picking out and packing in a series of elements along the way. Particular to these are religious symbols: the Christmas trees, the "ancient wooden capstan" with its "melancholy stains, like dried blood," the reference to "total immersion" and the (ironic?) singing of the hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."[50] Indeed, in the 1955 letter to U.T. and Joseph Summers, Bishop notes that she "made the change about the hymn because 'A Mighty Fortress' isn't sung by Baptists."[51] Bishop, for one, would know this fact given that she was raised in both the Baptist and Presbyterian faiths

and could recite hymns well into adulthood.[52]

Why might Bishop have made this particular change? It occurs specifically in relation to the seal who, like the poem's speaker, is "a believer in total immersion."[53] The hymn in question was written by Martin Luther in 1529. Elsewhere in his writings (specifically his *De Captivitate* from 1520), he made the case for total immersion as a more accurate symbolic representation of the full theological import of baptism. Like the seal in Bishop's poem, Luther was obviously "interested in music."[54] Moreover, as a representation of his theological beliefs, while he was a professor at Wittenberg University, Luther designed a seal (a white rose encompassing a red heart containing a black cross) to visualize his belief in grace and the true faith. Writing to the Wittenberg town clerk, Herr Spengler, Luther described his design as follows:

> The first thing expressed in my seal is a cross, black, with the heart, to put me in mind that faith in Christ crucified saves us. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness."
>
> Now, although the cross is black, mortified, and intended to cause pain, yet it does not change the colour of the heart, does not destroy nature—i.e., does not kill, but keeps alive. "For the just shall live by faith—by faith in the Saviour."
>
> But this heart is fixed upon the centre of a white rose, to show that faith causes joy, consolation and peace. The rose is white, not red, because white is the ideal colour of all angels and blessed spirits.
>
> This rose, moreover, is fixed in a sky-coloured ground, to denote that such joy of faith in the spirit is but an earnest and beginning of heavenly joy to come, as anticipated and held by hope, though not yet revealed.
>
> And around this groundbase is a golden ring, to signify that such bliss in heaven is endless, and more precious than all joys and treasures, since gold is the best and most precious metal. Christ our dear Lord, He will give grace unto eternal life.[55]

Bishop makes a very deliberate change: to reference Luther's most famous hymn and for her speaker to sing it to a seal both reinforces Bishop's reputation for dry humor and clouds some of the claims of the Foster letters that the seal, for all intents and purposes, represents Ruth Foster. What is produced—whatever the balances between Freudian identification, biographical fact, and poetic imagining—is a confluence of imagery and symbolism within a poem that Bishop revised and redrafted at least seven times before publication. She aims for re-formation, if not (Lutheran) Reformation. The environment of the Nova Scotian fishhouses is aesthetically refigured as Bishop combines remembered details of a particular place with fragments of imagined scenarios and unconscious impulses. If the poem is a veiled discussion of psychoanalytic practice, as the Foster letters suggest, the fractured landscape of Bishop's biography offers itself as a set of difficult and at times traumatic circumstances. Although not a war poem, its closing movement offers

resolutions to complex situations and to pain; and not temporary or time-specific solutions, either. The knowledge with which the poem concludes is ongoing, extending into the future just as much as it has come to us from the past. Access to it is a risk, requiring pain. As the foregoing poem proceeds, it moves toward this recognition of the condition as well as the value of knowledge. "At the Fishhouses" follows a trajectory from the particular to a universal understanding of the self's relation to the world; moreover, it navigates how an aesthetics of now might possibly enact their necessary offices when confronted with the most difficult of circumstances. Later, Bishop will connect history and a coming into self-consciousness in "In the Waiting Room" from *Geography III* (1976), her child speaker in that poem fainting in a dentist's waiting room while reading the *National Geographic* and then entering a world where "The War was on" and it is "still the fifth/Of February, 1918."[56] At that poem's conclusion, while everything seems the same, everything (for the child) has changed as she emerges into the wartime winter evening as a newly self-conscious being. Knowledge has been attained that will not be relinquished, though it too is accompanied by "an oh! of pain."[57]

The encounter with the seal in "At the Fishhouses" is as much a symbolic interruption as it is a recollection—referencing Bishop's dual Baptist and Presbyterian upbringing, though she did not practice any religion in her daily adult life—on the path toward what we imagine knowledge to be. Such knowledge is not already fully available, nor containable; it is part of a larger sweep of historical accretion. To attempt to do it justice, for the purposes of the poem it must be imagined, but language can only find approximate comparisons for it: "It is like what we imagine knowledge to be," this water that appears to be "a transmutation of fire."[58] Bishop hence offers us an "historical awareness of another sort," as Matthiessen referred to it in Salzburg, one month before Bishop's poem was published in 1947. Matthiessen spoke of the promise, not anxiety, of an occasion in which historical awareness could permit the reconnection of the world's peoples sundered by warfare. Bishop's insertion into historical awareness is one that invites, indeed necessitates, pain: pain in the present, pain visceral at evening (to adapt a Stevens line). Pain is human; it is part of our knowledge of existence in this world. Yet, poetry, while recognizing this fact, incorporates it within a wider aesthetic frame capable of accommodating "All pleasures and all pains," as Stevens registers it in one of his earliest poems, "Sunday Morning" from 1915, another work conceived during a time of European warfare.[59]

The portfolio of American studies over the last seventy years has been extended, indeed must continue to be extended, by very particular and insistently political issues that, in recent times, have followed each other in quick succession. To take some brief examples: the shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman (later acquitted) on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida, directly inspired the Black Lives

Matter movement; another murder, that of another unarmed teenager, Michael Brown, on August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, also by a police officer (Darren Wilson; not indicted), led to weeks of violent protests. The following year, on May 20, 2015, the African American Policy Forum, together with the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies at Columbia Law School and twenty associated sponsors, hosted the #SayHerName vigil in memory of black females who had died either in police custody or as a result of police officers discharging their firearms. The election of Donald Trump as the forty-fifth President of the United States was followed in January 2017 by the Women's March, most markedly in Washington, D.C., but also in other venues across the United States and around the world, in part to protest the new president's well-documented record of misogyny and multiple allegations of his sexual misconduct. In August 2017, a peaceful protest against an alt-right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, was rammed by a car driven by a neo-Nazi supporter resulting in the death of 32-year-old Heather Heyer. Also in 2017, starting in October, the #MeToo movement dominated social media in the wake of sexual abuse allegations by over eighty women against film producer Harvey Weinstein; the fact of Trump's presidency undoubtedly galvanized what rapidly became a global campaign calling out sexual misconduct. The almost instantaneous eruption of this movement—within twelve hours of a tweet by Alyssa Milano on October 15 that included #MeToo, the hashtag was used over 200,000 times; on Facebook, 4.7 million users used the hashtag in twelve million posts in the first twenty-four hours—signaled the extent of a sexual abuse pandemic across western society, and particularly the United States.[60] A toxic mix of domestic unrest unleashed by Trump's election victory combined with a set of international circumstances that would not have been anticipated just two or three years previously has ensured that the open ruptures within American society will continue to pour forth debates requiring urgent critical attention and discussion. Incidents of racial hatred, of right-wing extremism, and of abusive misogynistic sexism, dormant to varying degrees prior to Trump's election, have come to the surface of a nation increasingly riven by what the reality of his presidency means for America.

When in time to come, another seventy years, and more, the scholars of those generations look back to this particular moment, they will undoubtedly see a time of anxiety, of violence, and of protest overshadowing much that had previously offered promise. Whatever the outcomes of the current geopolitical travails, of the four (or possibly eight) years of a Trump White House, and of the evolution of the European Union in the wake of the debacle that is Brexit, our future colleagues, while scratching their heads at the legacies they have inherited, would also do well to remember Bishop's instruction that "knowledge is historical." Knowledge is part of the continuum of history. It is quite possible that the cycle of history through

which we currently pass is repeating a series of errors that culminated in the Second World War. The shift to the right, in America as well as European states in recent times, certainly augurs ill for the immediate present and the twenty-first century short-term. Yet, as Bishop's poetry highlights—allied to the fact that a significant volume of women are becoming politicized in response to Trump's presidency—this time will also pass and the historical knowledge of individuals, of a society, and of a nation will make itself heard. It is a process, both "flowing, and flown," that must not, that will not cease.

Notes

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22 Wallace Stevens, "Holiday in Reality," in *Collected Poetry & Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 276.

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The Feminist Futures of American Studies

Addressing the Post-Weinstein Media and Cultural Landscape

Julia Leyda

Abstract

This article reflects on the long-term and recent developments in the interdisciplinary field of American studies and its imbrications with its cultural and political contexts. Pushing back against premature assertions of feminism's obsolescence, I argue that scholars and teachers of American studies and media studies must take the popular seriously—popular film and television as well as popular political movements. Given the growing demand from students for a deeper and more sustained engagement with intersectional feminism, the article works through some short case studies to urge even the confirmed feminists to rethink and refresh their approaches to teaching and performing scholarship to best provide students with the theoretical tools to strengthen and define their feminism as a discipline as well as an attitude. Inspired by the popular 2014 movement, "The Year of Reading Women," the #MeToo and #TimesUp phenomena, and the popularity of and backlash against celebrity feminism of Beyoncé and others, this article weaves together academic and pop-cultural sources such as Sara Ahmed and Roxane Gay to underscore our responsibility to maintain, nurture, and contribute to the progress made by previous generations of feminists.

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The Feminist Futures of American Studies

Addressing the Post-Weinstein Media and Cultural Landscape

Julia Leyda

When I received the invitation to deliver a keynote to the 2017 conference of the Austrian Association for American Studies named "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" I planned to organize the talk around my own wide-ranging academic career, which has traversed several continents and disciplines. I was going to build an argument about transdisciplinarity and transnationality that touched on my own ongoing research in climate change narratives and on the financialization of domestic space. Yet as 2017 wore on, I began to have a creeping sense that another topic was somehow more urgent, and perhaps just as timely, if not more so.

As Ralph Poole's brilliant keynote reminded us,[1] F. O. Matthiessen conceived of American civilization's "saving characteristic" as its "sharp critical sense of both its excesses and its limitations."[2] We in American studies have made a habit of exercising this sharp critical sense, aspiring to live up to Margaret Mead's assertion, in her report on the Salzburg Seminar of 1947, that American culture is one in which "self-criticism is a necessary condition."[3] I had gone back to revisit the Joyce Carol Oates short story that lent the 2017 AAAS conference its name, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" (1966), which I had probably last read when I was close in age to its teen protagonist. In becoming reacquainted with the character of Arnold Friend, I found in the story's theme of the threat of sexual violence and predatory masculinity what I took to be a dismayingly timely confirmation of my choice of topic for my keynote. And so in the spirit of criticism and self-criticism, and with deference to the message that Hanna Wallinger conveyed to us from Oates herself about the need, now more than ever, to cultivate the ability "to recognize evil in its most banal forms,"[4] I will undertake a somewhat more polemical project, shifting from literary and historical subjects to popular culture and visual texts, but for all that I hope to open up a discussion about what we do as Americanists and how we

envision and enable feminist futures for our discipline and, one hopes, beyond.

Feminism, Postfeminism, and Contemporary American Studies

In my recent academic posts in Japan, Germany, and Norway, I have noticed one clear change over the last decade or so: increasing numbers of students want to talk, read, and write about intersectional feminism (and many arrive already equipped with feminist concepts and perspectives acquired through social media). This shifted baseline awareness is visible in the new prominence of feminism in public discourses, a welcome change from the 1980s and 1990s, when my generation of Americanists were coming of academic age. Today, students in most countries are steeped in a host of varieties of American popular culture in which this emergent vernacular feminism co-exists alongside powerful backlashes, as well as the subtler dismissals embodied in "postfeminism" that assume fighting sexism is irrelevant and outdated. With co-authors Diane Negra and Jorie Lagerwey, I have written about the rise of female-centered television and its context within contemporary emergent vernacular and corporate feminisms.[5] My present article builds on our 2016 article and extends its reach to the momentous changes in the US screenscape in 2017, in light of the Women's Marches in response to the inauguration of Donald Trump, the investigative reporting and activism that brought down Harvey Weinstein, and the thriving online activism that fosters a wealth of online GIFs, memes, blogs, Tumblrs, etc. that make it easy to express and share feminist sentiments (Illustration 1).

Particularly now that feminism is being appropriated in advertising and fashion, and as a buzzword in corporate and conservative rhetorics, the critical thinking skills of the humanities are sorely needed. This might seem paradoxical: surely, we may reason, because of the "comeback" of popular feminism, we in the academy can begin to take a bit more for granted in terms of student awareness or even acceptance of the basic tenets of feminism? It does take less work nowadays to move discussions of gender forward, and often such discussions face less resistance. Teaching in Norway, too, means that more students enter the room with a different cultural knowledge of feminism than, say, students in Japan. I don't want to over-generalize nor do I presume a non-existent universality across different classrooms and national contexts. But I draw on my own experience of recent changes, which is backed up by feminist scholars such as Sara Ahmed:

> I think we have in recent years witnessed the buildup of a momentum around feminism, in global protests against violence against women; in the increasing number of popular books on feminism; in the high visibility of feminist activism on social media; in how the word feminism can set the stage on fire for women

Illustration 1: Meme alluding to Donald Trump's admissions of groping women.
As a meme, this image is in public domain. From: https://me.me/i/finally-understand-rk-why-all-the-trump-women-stand-like-83564d30fc3d4a2794b93a74db69e818 (July 1, 2019).

> artists and celebrities such as Beyoncé. And as a teacher, I have witnessed this buildup firsthand: increasing numbers of students who want to identify themselves as feminists, who are demanding that we teach more courses on feminism; and the almost breathtaking popularity of events we organize on feminism, especially queer feminism and trans feminism. Feminism is bringing people into the room.[6]

Perhaps because coming to feminist consciousness can be a profound personal and emotional experience, in addition to a powerful intellectual development, it can resemble a conversion. And if Beyoncé can hasten that process for young people today, all the better. And yet, this very momentum can also produce a sense of over-familiarity, a "yes, yes, we all agree" that can operate almost like a dismissal. Ahmed describes it this way: "[T]here is a fantasy of feminist digestion, as if feminism has already been taken in and assimilated into a body and is thus no longer required."[7] The prevalence of "fame-inism," to borrow Roxane Gay's term for celebrity feminism,[8] which Debra Ferreday and Geraldine Harris interrogate in their co-edited special section of *Feminist Theory*,[9] means that scholars who teach and research in

the realms of popular culture have a crucial role to play. We can begin our conversation of popular feminist momentum, then, with Gay's assertion that "fame-inism is a gateway to feminism, not the movement itself."[10] If celebrity feminism is one of the currents in contemporary culture that is, as Ahmed suggests, "bringing people into the room," our task in academia is to figure out where we ought to take them from there, where they want to go, and to equip them for the journey.

The mainstreaming of feminism *as an attitude* is doubtless leading more students to delve into feminism as a discipline. However, recently I've experienced a worrying phenomenon in which some enthusiastic students want to equate their familiarity with and support for mainstream pop feminism with the requisite expertise in feminist theory necessary to, say, write an academic thesis. The "fantasy of feminist digestion" is a poor substitute for a rigorous engagement with feminist scholarship. This paradoxical dilemma—which I could never have anticipated back in the days of backlash—is even more reason for Americanists to provide firm academic foundations for the next generations of feminist research. These foundations come out of not only popular culture and lived experience, but what Ahmed calls feminist "companion texts" from Woolf to Firestone to Lorde, which

> might spark a moment of revelation in the midst of an overwhelming proximity; they might share a feeling or give you resources to make sense of something that had been beyond your grasp; companion texts can prompt you to hesitate or to question the direction in which you are going, or they might give you a sense that in going the way you are going, you are not alone.[11]

American studies prides itself on its engagements with social change movements and the study of inequality, so the discipline is well-positioned to build on the recent feminist momentum outside academia. However, if Americanists take this popularity for granted, we risk lending credibility to specious postfeminist arguments claiming that gender equality is already achieved and we needn't bother anymore. As Ahmed writes, "A significant step for a feminist movement is to recognize what has not ended."[12] Intersectional feminism is indispensable to the twenty-first-century interdisciplinary Americanist agenda, and we have a responsibility to provide the critical tools and ethical lenses that these new generations will need.

I believe that we need to renew our commitment to intersectional feminism to ensure a feminist future for American studies. I don't mean to come across as hectoring; I also need to remember that feminism is a process of constantly examining and questioning one's own practice and assumptions, and we should remember to turn the lens on ourselves. A quick example in the mode of self-criticism: the Year of Reading Women, 2014. I was teaching in Japan, where most students in our literature department were women, and I decided to integrate the spirit of the Year of

Reading Women into my classes. In my first-year course in American short fiction I usually maintained a 50/50 gender balance on the reading list, but that year I redesigned it to consist entirely of women writers and explained on the first day that I had done it to show that we could study "American literature" reading only female authors. Some of the students started the semester a bit dubious, but all ended up enthusiastically asserting that women writers were indeed both a source of insight on gender, and a diverse group of American authors with a wide array of aesthetic and thematic concerns. When I asked them at the end of the term whether they felt they were missing something in the semester's readings, they said, "No."

The other side of the Year of Reading Women, however, gave me insight into how I was living my own feminist life. I committed to reading only women authors for the entire year in my leisure reading. This at first felt unnecessary, because after all I am a feminist! I love so many women writers! Yet in my guilty-pleasure genre fiction—science fiction and crime novels—I found myself having to seek recommendations and skim "best of" lists looking for women authors. Setting aside the novels of Iain M. Banks and Stieg Larsson, I am ashamed to say that I had never read Nnedi Okorafor or Tana French until I took that pledge. Now I find it's a stubborn habit to break. Years later, moving to Norway, I decided to delve more deeply, ladies first, into Nordic crime fiction. I've barely sampled male authors—Anne Holt, Karin Fossum, and Camilla Läckberg are keeping me busy.

My point is that even those of us who feel confident in our feminism can benefit from a bit of self-examination and an occasional syllabus shake-up. We need to remember that feminism is not an end point; it is a process. Moreover, it is not only an individual process but a disciplinary and institutional one that requires constant rejuvenation. As Ahmed observes, "It seems once the pressure to modify the shape of disciplines is withdrawn, they spring back very quickly into the old shape. We have to keep pushing; otherwise things will be quickly reversed to how they were before."[13] At both the individual and the disciplinary level, the complacency that can accompany that numbing sense of "feminist digestion" can only be countered by vigilance and self-criticism, maintaining the pressure to recognize and rectify power imbalances along lines of gender but also race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, ability, age, and class.

This is especially true for white women, who made up fifty-two percent of Trump voters in the United States. Intersectional feminism performs a similar function within feminism that feminism performs in the wider world: It makes people uncomfortable and insists on a constant awareness of one's own blind spots and biases. But when *USA Today* publishes articles bearing the headline, "What is intersectional feminism? A look at the term you may be hearing a lot,"[14] we need to find

ways to build on this new ubiquity by bringing its promise into our classrooms, and to approach it with the critical principles that form the basis of contemporary American studies scholarship.

In what follows, I'd like to sketch a few case studies to open up a conversation about how the post-election "state of emergency" mindset around race and gender, combined with the remarkable slate of films and television series released in the aftermath, creates a captive audience for feminist viewing positions and thus an occasion for discussing these issues, including the still galling problems of white privilege within feminism. These texts are drawn from the rich array of potential material from 2017—a year that began, for many of us, like a hangover, staring up from the bottom of a cold, damp abyss of dejection and disbelief. But the year also brought an embarrassment of riches for feminist Americanists in film and television studies, including the two biggest Emmy winners—*Big Little Lies* (HBO, 2017–) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Hulu, 2017–).[15] Perhaps catering to "feminist momentum" in popular culture, these series and several others in the United States and United Kingdom explicitly thematize violence against women and sexual harassment as institutional, systemic phenomena that demand collective resistance as well as enormous individual fortitude.[16] This was also the year when *Wonder Woman*, with its canonical superhero narrative and naive but ass-kicking protagonist burst onto movie screens and in the media. Yet these screen texts were conceived (if not produced) before the Trump presidency, which subsequently lent them a sudden unanticipated urgency as they were released over the course of the year. I suggest that this urgency also provides a new impetus for creative, engaged, provocative acts of resistance and self-examination in our academic and private lives.

Big Little Lies and the Female *Rückenfigur*

My first case study performs a feminist textual analysis of a critically successful popular 2017 series focusing on the key theme of female survival, and then briefly examines its reception in the media as the product of feminist creators. The visual strategies of the series align with its female-centered narrative, each in its own way placing measured emphasis on individual women's lives alongside the cumulative effect of their collective existential struggles. Its complex, devastating portrait of intimate partner violence brought needed attention to its insidious psychological and social effects, as its anatomy of female friendships and rivalries earned praise for subtlety and verisimilitude. The series portrays violence against women as a blight that spreads to affect all its female leads, and its emphasis on the collective process of surviving violence breaks important new ground in television drama.

In its thematics and its aesthetics, the first season of *Big Little Lies* crystallizes

many of the structures of feeling that marked 2017. The series won eight Emmys and four Golden Globes, in addition to making most critics' annual top ten lists; along with *The Handmaid's Tale*, it was one of the most critically successful series of the year. *BLL* cannot be separated from the contexts of its reception, a year scarred by Trump and Weinstein. At a time when women were pushed—by politics and by pop culture—to think hard about gendered violence and collective action, *BLL* not only thematized the need for survival strategies in its narrative, it also provided visual motifs that underscored the power and profundity of women's contemplation. Shooting individual characters from behind, standing before the sublime Pacific, the show presents a series of images recalling the *Rückenfigur* of Romantic painting. Traditionally, the motif depicts a male figure facing a vista overlooking a natural landscape, interpreted by art historians as the human awed by Nature. By feminizing and serializing this motif, *BLL* intervenes in the visual convention of solitary male Romanticism on behalf of a (white, middle-class) feminist resistance narrative. *BLL*'s *Rückenfigur* constitutes a revisionist articulation of the traditional motif that here signifies women's agency in the face of, and their collective survival of, the seemingly overwhelming threat of male violence.

Briefly summarized, the series tells the story of a group of privileged heterosexual women in the idyllic Northern California coastal town of Monterey whose children all attend the same school. Some of the women are friends or become friends over the course of the story; others are more like rivals or antagonists depending mostly on their relationship with Madeleine (Reese Witherspoon). Celeste (Nicole Kidman) and Jane (Shailene Woodley) are loyal friends, while Renata (Laura Dern) and Bonnie (Zoë Kravitz) must cope with Madeleine's disapproval and frequent hostility. The series weaves a complicated web of emotions among the women, based on the status of their secrets and their ongoing crises and vulnerabilities. Celeste conceals her husband's abuse, while Jane reveals her ongoing trauma stemming from a rape several years earlier that left her pregnant with her son. Rivalries add another layer of complexity: successful Silicon Valley executive Renata is an easy target for the resentment of stay-at-home mom Madeleine, while lithe young yoga instructor Bonnie (the only woman of color among the leads) poses a threat as Madeleine's ex-husband's current spouse.

The series exploits the seaside setting of Monterey to maximum effect: justifiably renowned for its striking beauty, the Northern California coast in this area provides scenes of surf crashing onto jagged rocks and vertiginous cliff sides shrouded in fog, as well as gentler sandy beaches and golden sunsets. The series takes full advantage of these spectacular scenarios, and of course one of the best ways to showcase such a landscape is to shoot characters standing in front of it. This setup works especially well when several of the characters are wealthy enough to have ocean views from

their private homes, indoors and out, as well as private beach access. Incorporating the ocean as a primary feature into the visual design of the series thus makes perfect sense; what I aim to do here is interrogate the way in which the shots of the women before the ocean convey particular meanings in relation to the thematics of the show while recalling and revising traditional symbolic and art-historical conventions associated with these images.

The ocean has been highly symbolic in Western art. Its fecundity as a habitat for life, including human-sustaining food resources, makes it a frequent emblem of fertility and perhaps consequently renders it personified as female. On the other hand, its size, depth, force, and unpredictability are often portrayed as deadly, whether vindictively so, or callously indifferent to human life; Greek and Roman pantheons rendered the often violent and lethal god of the sea as male. Regardless of its gender assignation, however, the ocean is one of the most common avatars of sublime Nature—limitless, inconceivably vast, and dwarfing human stature and individual powers of perception. In keeping with these varied meanings inscribed on the sea, the Pacific Ocean near Monterey, as pictured in *BLL*, oscillates among many moods and modes of representation: a calm, soothing constellation of colors, sounds, and textures; a mysterious, obscured landscape enveloped in fog and mist; and a violent maelstrom of foamy surf. The images of the ocean in the series are sometimes devoid of human figures—establishing shots and cutaways of the landscape as the characters drive past in their cars along the Pacific Coast Highway. But many of the shots position a figure in front of the seascape, and it is to these I would like to turn more attention.

The first time I watched the series, I noticed the repetition of rear-view shots of Renata on her enormous veranda, which spurred me to watch for other instances of this motif. The willowy silhouette of Laura Dern's character facing the sublime view of the Pacific Ocean immediately recalls the Romantic motif of the *Rückenfigur*, while at the same time significantly revising its conventional connotations. Perhaps the most famous example of the classic *Rückenfigur* is the *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818; Illustration 2) by Caspar David Friedrich. This painting forms the cornerstone of Joseph Koerner's extensive scholarship on the *Rückenfigur*. Koerner's study of Friedrich popularized the concept of the *Rückenfigur*, arguing that the paintings "are strangely sadder and lonelier when they are inhabited by a turned figure than when they are empty [of people]."[17]

To make a gross oversimplification, and to overlook the nuances of Koerner's insightful analysis of Friedrich's oeuvre and its socio-political contexts in nineteenth-century Germany and in European painting more generally, I propose to adapt the concept for my purposes as it pertains to gender, in the quite different

Illustration 2: Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (c. 1818). This painting exemplifies the *Rückenfigur*, a human figure seen from behind, usually positioned before and gazing at a sublime landscape.

Image uploaded to *Wikimedia Commons* by user Cybershot800i, from *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Wanderer_above_the_sea_of_fog.jpg (July 1, 2019).

aesthetic and socio-cultural contexts of twenty-first-century US-American television. Like Koerner's mostly male figures, these women function as intermediaries between the viewer and the wilderness. As they contemplate the sublime, we contemplate them together with the sublime. In this sense, they help to digest or dilute some of its force—as shock absorbers for the viewer, they soften the blow. Even so, we are drawn into their act of looking, even as we are involved in our own act of looking at them. But one of the Romantic vestiges of this visual convention holds that not only is the human looking into the sublime; at the same time, the sublime is looking into the human. The sense of mastery inherent in the unpopulated landscape takes on greater ambivalence as the landscape here also appears to master or overwhelm the human figure. Whether the majestic mountains or the infinite sea, the human figure in rear view positioned before such a sublime vista—we imagine—feels awe faced with its presence.

The differences in temporality between painting and moving image media also enable me to alter Koerner's conception of the rear-view figure as a solitary image now past: *BLL* employs the *Rückenfigur* as a serial image recurring within a single text, across different scenarios and embodied by different characters throughout the ten episodes of season one, yet all conjoined into the relative coherence of the show's narrative and visual design. Depending on the scene, the figure of the woman before the seascape might suggest her power, her isolation, her beauty, and/or her sense of "drowning" in her own melancholy, rage, or other overwhelming emotion. All four central women characters in the series appear repeatedly in similar rear view shots against the seascape—analogous to the Romantic *Rückenfigur*, I argue. Frequently positioning the woman alone in the frame, these shots recur often enough to constitute a motif in the series, which I argue signifies a revision of the classic *Rückenfigur*.

The scene in which the *Rückenfigur* first struck me as a visually significant motif in the series is a nearly three-minute sequence of Renata facing the ocean view at twilight, holding a wine glass and conversing with her husband who sits behind her (Illustration 3). She is not alone, and not silent, as the figure in the paintings appears to be. Yet only occasionally does she turn to him—she is transfixed by the sea, and the camera never circles around to film her in a frontal shot. Renata is ranting about how the other women ostracize and isolate her, defending herself as a successful working mother with a full-time job, and postulating that they resent her for having maintained her career. Although she and her husband are wealthy enough to live in such luxury, commanding such a view of the ocean from their home, Renata's visual superimposition over the infinity of the sky and sea here also inherently question the value of their material success, even as her lines convey her defensiveness about her choice to remain in the professional world. Notably Renata is the most "successful"

Illustration 3: Renata (Laura Dern) stands framed in a rearview silhouette shot on her veranda.
Frame capture from *Big Little Lies*, "Somebody's Dead" (Season 1, Episode 1). *Big Little Lies* © HBO, 2017. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

and powerful female character, which is manifest in the way she most often enjoys such an unmediated ocean view, while the others often gaze through windows and doorframes, or share the image frames with other people such as family members.

In stark contrast to Renata's socio-economic power, the character of Jane is the youngest and the least economically secure—a single mother working as a bookkeeper, renting a modest one-bedroom (non-beachfront) house with her young son. They drive or bike to the beach, rather than gaze at it directly from their home. Jane struggles with post-traumatic episodes connected with the sexual assault that resulted in her pregnancy, and throughout the series we see flashbacks of her in her silky blue dress walking barefoot on the beach in what appears to be the immediate aftermath of the attack. The absence of power signifiers in comparison to the shots of Renata are striking: She has just survived a rape, she is walking (or sometimes running) without shoes in the wet sand at dawn, she is at ground level rather than surveying it from an elevated viewpoint, and she appears to be following a man whose footprints in the sand abruptly end, leading her nowhere (Illustration 4).

The two other central women in *BLL* are best friends Madeleine and Celeste. Both are married, stay-at-home moms and live in large waterfront homes that afford them easy beach access and framed views of the ocean through their windows and doorways. Both also have marital problems, granted of different orders of severity, and both express dissatisfaction with their lack of a career. Their appearances as

Illustration 4: Jane (Shailene Woodley) appears in a recurring scene on the beach, which flashes back to the immediate aftermath of her rape.

Frame capture from *Big Little Lies*, "Somebody's Dead" (Season 1, Episode 1). *Big Little Lies* © HBO, 2017. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

Illustration 5: Madeleine (Reese Witherspoon) stands in rearview framed by the doorway leading from her kitchen to her veranda.

Frame capture from *Big Little Lies*, "Serious Mothering" (Season 1, Episode 2). *Big Little Lies* © HBO, 2017. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

Rückenfiguren tend to be framed from inside the domestic spaces of their homes—kitchen, bedroom—or place them in shared frames with their husbands and/or children (Illustration 5). In his analysis of the Friedrich painting *Woman at the Window* (1821; Illustration 6), one of the few examples of a female subject in his study of the motif, Koerner argues that the framing of the female *Rückenfigur* before the window, looking out onto the landscape, "expresses not an identification with, or emersion in, the landscape, but rather a separation from it."[18] This extremely confining image only hints at what lies outside: We can see the mast of a ship, with sky and distant trees. The woman's leaning position also produces a sense in the viewer of straining to see what is almost hidden, only partially visible. While this painting could serve any number of interpretations of women's domesticity in nineteenth-century Europe, Koerner doesn't speculate on its gendered implications. However, in the twenty-first-century American context, it is remarkable that the women in *BLL* are still indoors looking out, though their windows are larger and our views from behind their *Rückenfiguren* less obstructed.

Wealthy former attorney Celeste's beachfront home also has a massive veranda and direct ocean views from many windows, and when she is pictured outside on the veranda or on the beach, she usually shares the frame with her twin sons and/or husband Perry (Alexander Skarsgård). When surrounded by men, she often exudes a sense of waifish surrender, allowing her boys to get their way or trying ineffectually to assert control over their behavior. This lack of control extends into her violently abusive relationship with Perry, in which she is trapped in textbook scripts of intimate partner violence: he beats her, they have rough makeup sex that she appears to enjoy, he apologizes, she forgives him, it starts over again. Her isolated *Rückenfigur* also telegraphs her lack of power and her sense of helplessness in the cycle of abuse, which repeats itself as regularly as the tides (Illustration 7). In these shots, her contemplation of the ocean through their bedroom's picture window could signify any number of meanings. Is she consumed with melancholy or self-destructive urges? Does the ocean instill a sense of insignificance in the face of its vastness, thus helping to calm her unquiet moods and aid her in hiding her distress? Does she grow to identify with its power, inspiring her to take more decisive action to extricate herself and her sons from the poisonous embrace of Perry?

The images of Jane on the beach also lend themselves to ambiguous interpretations. With her immediate proximity to the ocean, her bare feet caked with wet sand, the bedraggled condition of her hair and wardrobe, the shots contribute to the recurring scene's intense emotional power in bringing her (and us) back to the immediate aftermath of her rape (Illustration 8). We aren't sure what she's thinking, but the visual composition and its context within the narrative produce a powerful affective hit. Unlike Friedrich's "feminized" indoors-gazing-outward *Rückenfigur*

Illustration 6: Caspar David Friedrich, *Woman at a Window* (1821). This painting consitutes one of Friedrich's few female *Rückenfiguren* and employs a markedly different aesthetic approach to the human figure and the landscape upon which it gazes.

Image uploaded to *Wikimedia Commons* by user JarektUploadBot, from *Wikimedia Commons*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caspar_David_Friedrich_-_Woman_at_a_Window_-_WGA8268.jpg (July 1, 2019).

Illustration 7: Celese (Nicole Kidman) gazes at the ocean through her bedroom picture window following an assault and sexual encounter with her husband.

Frame capture from *Big Little Lies*, "Serious Mothering" (Season 1, Episode 2). *Big Little Lies* © HBO, 2017. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

Illustration 8: Jane stands at water's edge, poised before the Pacific Ocean.

Frame capture from *Big Little Lies*, "Serious Mothering" (Season 1, Episode 2). *Big Little Lies* © HBO, 2017. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

standing at the window, and the contemporary revisions of that image, Jane's framing rather recalls his more famous *Monk by the Sea* (1808–1810; Illustration 9), which dramatizes, Koerner observes, "a yearning for transcendence, for passage beyond the materiality of earthly existence."[19] Precariously employed, tormented by PTSD, and seemingly on the edge of violence, Jane's character alternately fantasizes about suicide and murdering her (unknown) rapist. Her relationship to the ocean appears to be similar to Koerner's interpretation of the monk: a desire for peace, surrender, release, and possibly death.

I realize that this is not the place to rehearse feminist arguments about the history of the representation of women in visual arts; many scholarly works and activist groups like the Guerilla Girls already do that very well. My speculations here into a recurring visual motif in *BLL* and its genealogy in European painting is but one approach to the series, taking as its point of departure the striking shots of the ocean and the serial repetition of *Rückenfigur* iconography across four different female characters; the parallels underscore the collectivity of the women, even as it also allows for subtle distinctions among them. As if to resolve the paradox of shared isolation that the *Rückenfigur* signified throughout the season, the final scene in the finale places the women together on the beach, shot from many different angles and proximities, with their children playing together, seemingly safe and at peace with one another and the world. Reading female figures through the lens of the usually male *Rückenfigur* foregrounds the meanings of the ocean landscape and its implications and associations with femininity as well as humanity.

Conceptually, I would also argue that we can see the *Rückenfigur* applied metaphorically to the women behind the camera and behind the scenes of the series. In 2017, the ongoing feminist critique of the screen industries took center stage, calling more attention than ever to the position of the woman as both object and subject of the look of the camera and the look of the audience, and as workers in an often hostile workplace. The show's executive producers include Reese Witherspoon and Nicole Kidman, who took prominent publicity roles leading up to its release in February 2017, mere months before what would, starting in October 2017, become the Harvey Weinstein scandal and #MeToo phenomena. Witherspoon is also active on Twitter and Instagram, and frequently posts messages and images that support feminist activist causes. Similarly, Kidman praised her mother's feminism for inspiring her in her acceptance speech upon winning Glamour Woman of the Year in November 2017,[20] and more emphatically when accepting her Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Limited Series.[21] Laura Dern's assertions of feminist solidarity and activism in her award acceptance speeches have also become important markers of the changes taking place in Hollywood that year. At the 2017 Emmy Awards, held in September of that year, she endorsed the "incredible tribe of fierce women" she worked

Illustration 9: Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea* (1808–1810). One of Friedrich's most famous paintings depicts the self at the threshold of the infinity of Nature.
Image uploaded to *Wikimedia Commons* by user Johann-commonswiki, from *Wikimedia Commons*, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ad/Monk_by_the_Sea.jpg (July 1, 2019).

with on the show.[22] Upon her win for Best Supporting Actress at the Golden Globes ceremony in January 2018, Dern passionately praised the #MeToo movement's rupture of the status quo surrounding sexual harassment and assault: "It was a culture of silencing, and that was normalized. I urge all of us to not only support survivors and bystanders who are brave enough to tell their truth, but to promote restorative justice."[23] As attention is rightly paid to the need for women to gain access to more industry power, Kidman, Witherspoon, and Dern, through their success with *BLL* as well as their work as well-established industry figures, have embraced the public role of advocating for feminist advances in the industry and for women coming forward to speak publicly about their experiences of discrimination, harassment, and assault.

And yet. For all the feminist momentum of 2017, including the significant push provided by the visual and narrative meanings of *Big Little Lies* and its critical and popular reception, the whiteness and class privilege on display in the series also demands critical attention. While the series features several actors of color in minor

roles including members of the police force investigating Perry's death, Bonnie, played by mixed-race actor Zoë Kravitz, is the only major character of color. As in many "token" roles, her ethnicity only asserts itself in her physical appearance, not in any social or cultural contexts: She is surrounded by whiteness, married to a white man, and integrated into a largely white affluent community, seemingly without family relationships or friendships with other people of color. Her role as a slightly eccentric, hippie-ish yoga instructor allows the white community to embrace her as a sign of their tolerance, an exotic and attractive "other" that causes them no trouble or discomfort. Notably, Bonnie is far less developed as a character than the other women, and never shot from behind facing the ocean as a *Rückenfigur*—her significance in the narrative is not pictured on a par with the other female characters.

Frightened and Aroused: *Wonder Woman*

The 2017 summer box office hit *Wonder Woman* also deserves a place in this conversation. In contrast to the "quality television" patina of the star-studded HBO series *Big Little Lies*, it is a superhero movie, following mainstream Hollywood conventions in its narrative and visual style, aiming to entertain and also uplift audiences with a positive image of (mostly white) female power leavened with pacifism and compassion in the character of Diana. Here, rather than a textual/visual analysis, I'd like to examine *Wonder Woman*'s surprising reception over the course of its record-breaking run. Like *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Big Little Lies*, this film was produced before the Orange One occupied the Oval Office and before the #MeToo movement, so the timing of its cinematic release had a marked effect on its reception.

The film was open to the kinds of critiques familiar to feminist comics fans, starting with Diana's sexy (albeit armored) costume and conventionally attractive appearance, which led one male character to remark that her skill in a bar fight left him "both frightened and aroused"—a clever instance of comic relief, but also a telling combination for a film starring a beauty pageant winner that many viewers experienced as nevertheless feminist.[24] The film's lack of diversity compared to the decades-old source text, which featured black Amazon characters, including Diana's sister Nubia, also drew critical ire, as in Cameron Glover's excellent *Harper's Bazaar* review (2017).[25] Casting Gal Gadot, a former Miss Israel who has publicly expressed support for the IDF, led to its being banned in Lebanon and fueled speculations about why the story is transposed from the Second World War setting of the comics to First World War.[26] Jack Halberstam rightly laments *Wonder Woman*'s hetero-romantic storyline and its erasure of the Amazons' lesbian genealogy and the original comics character's bisexuality, as well as the missed opportunity of employing as a framing device the origin story of the comics through its creator, the polyamorous feminist William Moulton Marston—subject of Angela Robinson's

film *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*, which debuted to positive reviews at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival.[27]

Despite these and many other valid critiques, *Wonder Woman* met with an astonishing surge of enthusiasm from women of all ages. Indeed, the numerous media reports and op-ed pieces about audiences moved to tears were striking: Many viewers had underestimated the emotional effect the film would have and were stunned at how powerful they found it. Jill Lepore, author of *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* (2014), admits in *The New Yorker*, "I am not proud that I found comfort in watching a woman in a golden tiara and thigh-high boots clobber hordes of terrible men. But I did."[28] Lepore's self-deprecating attitude at her own viewing pleasure watching a film based on the comics character she wrote an entire book about suggests that, at least for a relatively sophisticated viewer, this kind of mainstream genre film isn't expected to be moving. Many other female commentators and reviewers echoed Lepore's surprise at their own emotional responses. Among them, Jessica Bennett's op-ed describes her own responses; however, after quoting Lepore's remark, she counters that she was proud that "20 minutes into *Wonder Woman* . . . the tears came uncontrollably."[29]

These overwhelming emotional reactions themselves received plenty of coverage in the media. Bennett describes the "deeply visceral" experience she shared with "legions of women" who "walked out of theaters with a strange feeling of ferociousness" afterwards. She then intones, "Oh, this is what people mean when they talk about representation. This is why it matters."[30] Dana Stevens recounts her own epiphany about the power of screen images:

> [T]he moment Gadot first stripped down to her nonsexist skivvies and started beating the hell out of those civilian-targeting no-goodniks, I was shocked to find my eyes welling with tears and my mind toggling between the Great War and the Women's March. I suddenly glimpsed the value of our ongoing cultural debate about representation, even in genres one doesn't necessarily cherish.[31]

These responses indicate the need for us in American studies and the humanities to pay attention to how our current political moment has intensified the affective power of popular culture screen texts that might, in another context, have elicited less surprising responses and thus seemed less remarkable.[32]

At this point I would like to emphasize that Stevens is a movie critic for *Slate*, and Bennett a contributor to the *New York Times* on gender and sexuality issues. What should we make of the fact that these two professional white women journalists are reporting in 2017 that they have only just now realized why gender representations matter? If so, what will it take for them to recognize that racialized and other kinds of representation also matter? This brings me back to my argument that in these

times, educators in the humanities—specifically those of us in American studies and film and media studies—have something to offer: our continuing and rigorous investigations of power relations and systems of oppression, as well as our access to the histories of the politics of representation and its (apparently surprising) continued relevance. While among today's feminist scholars, the importance of representation has been largely taken as settled and "digested," as Ahmed might describe it, and superseded by more recent (and thus more sophisticated?) theories, those of us who teach ignore at our peril its relevance for our students and their peers.[33] Given the sea change now underway in public discourses about gender, our students need every advantage we can offer them as they struggle to make sense of the current debates and to pave the way for what we hope will be feminist futures.

Get Out!

In closing, I'd like to briefly emphasize another aspect of contemporary feminism that is particularly apt for American studies: intersectionality. Although what Jennifer Nash terms "the intersectionality wars" over the concept in contemporary humanities work show that it comes fraught with concerns about essentialism, identity politics, and appropriation, it remains central to the feminist futures of American studies.[34] The concept of intersectionality as James Bliss defines it can operate as not only as a process of self-criticism, but a questioning of wider social and disciplinary assumptions, as "an immanent critique of the institutional life of feminism: a critique not only of feminism's long-standing and continuing normative whiteness but of the very liberal multiculturalism that the incorporation of Black feminism is taken to signify."[35] The fact that in 2017 the invocation of "woman" still signifies primarily "white woman" demands attention in any proposition about feminism, particularly in popular culture. The prevailing whiteness of the two previous case studies, selected for their broad popularity and their explicit positioning within the contemporary resurgence of feminism (*qua* white feminism), should be a clear enough message that however popular feminism has become, it still frequently fails to adequately demonstrate intersectional awareness as a starting point. If these popular feminist texts are bringing people into the room, we still need to bring intersectional issues into that room. Today's feminist momentum's still-normative whiteness is all the more remarkable as it comes in the midst of the recent blossoming of African American film and television—including series such as *Insecure* (HBO, 2016–), *Atlanta* (FX, 2016–), *Empire* (Fox, 2015–2020), *Queen Sugar* (Oprah Winfrey Network, 2016–), *White Famous* (Showtime, 2015–2017), *Black-ish* (ABC, 2014–), *Dear White People* (Netflix, 2017–), and *The Chi* (Showtime, 2018–) that now crowd the television schedule along with important films like *Get Out* (2017), *Moonlight* (2016), and *Black Pan-*

ther (2018).

As scholars such as Amanda Lineberry have pointed out, the continuing elusiveness of a solid alliance between (white) feminism and the anti-racist struggle only underscores the necessity to insist on intersectionality in all conversations about feminism.[36] Indeed, the contentious tweetstorms and other social media trends that this year spurred the revival of the 2013 hashtag #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen attest to the continuing exclusion of women of color from (white) feminist discourse. This problem arose and was widely debated in the early planning stages of the Women's March, and in the belated recognition that the hashtag #MeToo popularized by white actor Alyssa Milano had in fact been coined earlier by a woman of color, Tarana Burke.[37] Elsewhere on Twitter, white actor Rose McGowan, embroiled in the #MeToo aftermath of Harvey Weinstein's public takedown, "went full white feminist," as Clarkisha Kent put it, in a tweet in which she redeployed the hackneyed racist analogy of woman = n*****, thus not only employing an offensive epithet, but also literally excluding black women from the category of women.[38] This same formulation on a protest sign at a 2011 New York Slutwalk had inspired the now-legendary 2011 blog post "My Feminism will be Intersectional or it will be Bullshit!" by Flavia Dzodan,[39] yet it still dogs the public discourses around feminism today. Cited by Sara Ahmed in her blog and in her latest book, Dzodan's motto of intersectional feminism has itself been adapted into a social media meme, which one hopes will lend it staying power. For all their feminist impulses and their ability to emotionally engage audiences through their aesthetic and affective power, *Big Little Lies* and *Wonder Woman* fail to live up to Dzodan's motto: Their feminism is not intersectional, and thus, in this sense, they are, indeed, bullshit. Their failure only underscores the need for today's feminist movements to fully take on board the concerns of the women of color they so often elide from the category of woman.

With this in mind, I close this meditation on the feminist futures of American studies with an argument for the necessity of intersectionality in our academic practice, whether research or teaching, by turning to the critique of white liberalism posited by the Oscar-winning movie *Get Out*.[40] In this 2017 film, Chris and Rose are a young straight couple visiting her white family for the weekend. After assuring Chris that her parents won't mind that he's black—they might even like him more, since they love Obama so much—they arrive, meet a lot of self-consciously "woke" rich white people, and things get strange very quickly. Adeptly carrying forward the venerable tradition of horror as social criticism—with clear nods to *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *The Stepford Wives* (1975; 2004)—*Get Out* flips numerous conventions by addressing a black implied audience rather than the usual unmarked white one. It opens with a racialized riff on the affluent leafy suburb as a place of dread, where a young black man doesn't need the threat of a serial killer to feel scared.

Simply walking down the street alone at night evokes horror—Peele comments on the fact that the film was made during the time when Trayvon Martin was killed for doing just that.[41] Taking clever gender-reversal liberties with the classic gaslight plot in which a romantic partner behaves as if the lover is delusional or mentally ill, the film manages to credibly incorporate a checklist of everyday micro-aggressions that black people endure. Placing the audience in a position to witness Chris's nerve-wracking experience of (at first) polite, (seemingly) unthinking white racism, *Get Out* cumulatively develops an insidious sense of discomfort that dovetails nicely with the (usually unquestioningly white-centered) horror genre.

As many reviewers noted, the scariest thing in this horror film is white people, especially white women. Rose's father and brother are also culpable as villains, but the real engine of evil here is the white mother-daughter dyad. *Get Out* dramatizes the elaborate evasions and self-justifications that enable white liberals to manufacture a facade of anti-racism to insulate themselves from criticism for their racist actions and inactions. Although Rose comes across at first as naive and well-intentioned, she shifts quickly into a more complicit and then an active role in manipulating and victimizing black men, including Chris. Counting on her ability to fall back on her white womanhood to the very end, Rose's impunity marks her as a "Becky," the pejorative term signifying "a white woman who uses her privilege as a weapon, a ladder, or an excuse" and immortalized in Beyoncé's lyric about "Becky with the good hair."[42] Rose in *Get Out* is clearly a Becky, wearing her liberal femininity as a mask that she hopes will conceal the horror of her whiteness.

As Allison McCarthy puts it, "Chris and Rose's relationship dynamic is as much a critique of white feminism as it is of 'post-racial' America."[43] Many reviewers of *Get Out* remind us that whiteness trumped feminism in the US 2016 election a couple of months before the film's wide release; the frequent mentions of President Obama in the film also call attention to the widely-held, self-congratulatory white liberal assumption that race no longer mattered in US society. Kendra James's review in the mainstream women's magazine *Cosmopolitan* observes that the film can be read as a warning: "White women have always played, and continue to play, a large part in upholding [white] supremacy. . . . Putting full trust in them has often been to our detriment."[44] The film mobilizes genre and spectatorship conventions to place African American subjects at the center of a film that literally as well as hyperbolically depicts white liberals', and especially white women's, betrayal of them. *Get Out* will likely prove to be a cornerstone text in academic conversations—in the classroom and in scholarly publications—about intersectionality and gender. American studies facing its feminist futures will do well to devise ways to address the concerns raised by this movie alongside white-dominated screen texts such as *Big Little Lies* and *Wonder Woman*, which garnered so much public and critical attention in 2017, that

notable year of feminist momentum.

Our American studies toolkit contains many options with which to facilitate the feminist futures I hope we have in store, and engagements with popular culture and media studies can only expand that repertoire. For example, we can learn from recent efforts in media studies to theorize gendered and affective dimensions of neoliberalism in research by feminists such as Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser, Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker, and Julie Wilson.[45] Likewise, the continuing relevance of Marxist concepts like Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling" and methods like ideology critique also point to their continued, dare I say "residual," relevance in twenty-first-century Americanist research and pedagogy. In asserting the ongoing need for intersectional feminist critique, contemporary work by bell hooks and Sara Ahmed explicitly rejects the teleological model of academic progress that would relegate a concern for representation to the scrap heap of outmoded approaches, to be superseded by newer, more cutting-edge critical trends. The fact that feminist arguments today cover some of the same ground as our predecessors did twenty, thirty, or forty years ago should tell us something: not that the field has grown stale, but that the problems that motivate feminists still proliferate, albeit in novel as well as familiar forms. Indeed, hooks continues to publish accessible intersectional feminist work: Her bestselling *Feminism is for Everybody* (2000) extends the oeuvre that goes back to her published dissertation, long since a feminist companion text for many, *Ain't I a Woman* (1981).[46] While some scholars might have moved on to work that offers seductive new approaches, hooks's enduring success and multi-generational readership attests to the continuing demand for works of popular feminism even as a new generation of popular feminist writers extends the range of voices in ongoing feminist conversations: Lindy West, Roxane Gay, Laurie Penny, Andi Zeisler, and Jessica Valenti, to name only a few.[47]

These conversations also benefit enormously from the "affective turn" and other recent critical tools we can bring to bear on how films mobilize emotions and structures of feeling that arise out of the Trump era. The expression of surprise from film critics at how central those old-school "politics of representation" frameworks—a textbook example of Ahmed's "digested feminism"—are in discussing the popularity of *Wonder Woman* in 2017, and the continued need for intersectional critique of white-centric representations within "feminist" texts, point to our need to deploy the full armory of intersectional feminist theory, including the back list of our inspiring archive, to face the future.

Notes

1 An article based on Ralph Poole's keynote address is included in this issue: Ralph J. Poole,

"'Huck Finn at King Arthur's Court': F. O. Matthiessen, the Salzburg Seminar, and American Studies," *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–26, https://doi.org/1047060/jaaas.v1i1.70.

2 F. O. Matthiessen, *From the Heart of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 15.

3 Margaret Mead, "The Salzburg Seminar on American Civilization 1947," *Salzburg Global Seminar*, 1947, accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.salzburgglobal.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Documents/General_SGS_Documents/1947_MeadArticle.pdf.

4 Hanna Wallinger and Joshua Parker, "Guest Editors' Editorial," *JAAAS: Journal of the Austrian Association for American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019): xi, https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v1i1.87.

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6 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), loc. 109.

7 Ibid., loc. 2213.

8 See Roxane Gay, "Lena Dunham: A Generation's Gutsy, Ambitious Voice," *Time*, September 24, 2014, https://www.time.com/3425759/lena-dunham-a-generations-gutsyambitious-voice.

9 Debra Ferreday and Geraldine Harris, eds., "Investigating 'Fame-inism': The Politics of Popular Culture," special issue, *Feminist Theory* 18, no. 3 (2017).

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13 Ibid., loc. 2219.

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15 *Big Little Lies: Season 1*, created and written by David E. Kelley (New York: HBO, 2017), Blu-ray; *The Handmaid's Tale: Season 1*, created by Bruce Miller (Santa Monica, CA: Hulu, 2017), Blu-ray.

16 To name a few such US and UK television productions in 2017, *Apple Tree Yard* (BBC One, 2017), *Broadchurch* (ITV, 2013–2017), *Top of the Lake* (BBC Two, 2013–), *One Mississippi* (Amazon Video, 2016–2017), and *SMILF* (Showtime, 2017–2019).

17 Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 162.

18 Ibid., 112.

19 Ibid., 120.

20 Neha Prakash, "Nicole Kidman's Dress was a Metaphor at the Glamour Women of the Year Awards," *Vanity Fair*, November 14, 2017, https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2017/11/nicole-kidman-women-of-the-year-good-love.

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24 *Wonder Woman*, directed by Patty Jenkins (Burbank, CA: DC Films, 2017).

25 Cameron Glover, "Why *Wonder Woman* is Bittersweet for Black Women," review of *Wonder Woman*, directed by Patty Jenkins, *Harper's Bazaar*, June 9, 2017, https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/a9992873/wonder-woman-black-women-erasure. Almost as if in response to critiques of the whiteness of *Wonder Woman*'s cast, *Black Panther* (2018) dominated the box office worldwide the next year, offering audiences a wide array of African women characters, exceeding tokenism and stereotyping and even exceeding the male lead in physical prowess and scientific knowledge. *Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler (Burbank, CA: Marvel Studios, 2018).

26 See Lina Abirafeh, "Wonder Woman: Feminist Icon or Symbol of Oppression?" *The Conversation*, June 23, 2017, http://theconversation.com/wonder-woman-feminist-icon-or-symbol-of-oppression-79674.

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The Cold War and New Sacred Poetry

Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, and Kathleen Ossip

Philipp Reisner

Abstract

While one might expect that poets who engage with the Cold War primarily adopt a political voice, many of them, in fact, rather assume a religious voice. Indeed, poets such as Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, and Kathleen Ossip examine the Cold War in light of theological questions. Their poems bear witness not to personal suffering inflicted by political and societal circumstances but instead to human resilience bolstered by faith in the face of traumatic experience. Their writings are not best captured by the frequently invoked "Poetry of Witness," understood as witness to injustice, but rather "new sacred poetry": colored by individual experience of trauma, their poetry serves as a vehicle for expressing spiritual and mystical experience. They thereby innovate not only poetry but also contemporary theology. The Cold War becomes the backdrop for the struggle between faith and suffering brought about by political, societal, and personal circumstances.

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The Cold War and New Sacred Poetry

Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, and Kathleen Ossip

Philipp Reisner

Many poets who engage with the Cold War adopt a religious rather than a political voice. Indeed, poets such as Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, and Kathleen Ossip examine the history of the Cold War in view of important theological questions. These poets bear witness not to personal suffering inflicted by political and societal circumstances but instead to human resilience supported by faith in the face of traumatic experience. Hence, these poems are not "Poetry of Witness" in the sense of a witness to injustice; rather, these authors' poetry is a means of facing traumatic experience with the help of faith.[1] Accordingly, their poems exemplify what I propose to call "new sacred poetry": colored by individual experience of trauma, these poems express spiritual and mystical experience, thereby transforming both poetry and contemporary theology. The Cold War becomes the historical backdrop for the struggle between faith and suffering brought about by political, societal, and personal circumstances.

Any treatment of Cold War poetry in English must distinguish between poetry written since the 1980s *about* topics related to the Cold War and poetry written *during* the Cold War.[2] The second category—that of classic Cold War poets—probably more readily comes to mind, as it includes luminaries such as Charles Olson, Richard Wilbur, Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, Derek Walcott, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, and Seamus Heaney. Their works have been investigated from a variety of perspectives—in view of poetic communities and schools,[3] the influence of science,[4] and academic professionalization,[5] among others. The younger generation of Cold War poets, such as Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, Kathleen Ossip, Brooks Haxton, Christian Wiman, Peter Cole, Eavan Boland, and Kevin Hart, offers a retrospective perspective on this generation-defining conflict. Their Cold War poems address questions relating to religion and spirituality, albeit from different denominational and cultural perspectives. Indeed, these poets belong to a larger movement which views the Cold

War as intertwined with the sacred. This movement emerged in the 1980s, which represent a turning point in the history of mysticism (as an important dimension of the sacred, and hence also of sacred poetry; this "mystical turn" has also been described as an "apophatic turn") and in the work of many poets internationally, for example in China following the return of modernism after the death of Mao Zedong.[6] In the context of contemporary American poetry, Diana von Finck and Oliver Scheiding have introduced a period starting in the 1980s, citing "language poetry" and neoformalism as significant new developments. The theological work of poetry in response to experiences of Cold War history adds a key layer to the definition of this new sub-epoch.[7]

Cold War history has recently turned its attention to the so-called second front of the Cold War, examining how the six powers—the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Japan, and North and South Korea—forged political and cultural environments that were distinct from the experience of the Cold War in Europe.[8] Cold War studies has also turned to the long-neglected subject of religion.[9] Axel Schäfer has suggested that the Cold War years offered "an unexpected ideological windfall for religious groups" and "bolstered the religious component in American culture and society."[10] Accordingly, Cold War poetry must be understood in view of this "religious renaissance," which has been dubbed a "Cold War awakening."[11]

My selection of Li-Young Lee and Suji Kwock Kim, two poets of East Asian descent, and Kathleen Ossip, the author of a poetry cycle programmatically titled *The Cold War* (2011), follows from this reassessment of Cold War historiography. Scholars have frequently interpreted Lee's and Kim's poetry through the lens of ethnic studies, a tendency reinforced by the discourse on linguistic and cultural hybridity, which has only recently been counterbalanced by more nuanced readings.[12] Framed by the historiographical shift mentioned above, and considering Lee's rejection of all ethnic labeling,[13] I will suggest in this article that reading Lee's and Kim's poems for their historical and religious meanings unlocks alternatives to previous readings. Similarly, the spiritual aspects of Ossip's poetry draw on her religious roots. The religious upbringing and denominational backgrounds of these three poets inform the way religious dimensions and biblical text appear in their poetry. I hence maintain that one needs to consider the poets' religious roots—a dimension frequently neglected in poetry scholarship—before exploring the significance of their ethnic origins. Granted, ethnicity plays an important role in this tradition of Cold War poetry; however, this role is secondary to religious belief. That is, the more important questions these poems raise concern religious rather than ethnic culture.

Both Li-Young Lee and Suji Kwock Kim come from Protestant backgrounds. Lee inherited his faith from his father, who worked as a Presbyterian priest for the socially

marginalized in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania. Lee's father converted to Christianity as an adult before emigrating from China, which set him and his family on a long migratory journey through East Asia prior to arriving in the United States. In Lee's case, religiosity is thus not directly connected to ethnicity. For Kim, in contrast, the significance of religion may be explained by the central role Christianity plays in the Korean immigrant community. The experience of immigration reinforced the importance of religion for both Lee and Kim since Christian churches and communities supported the newcomers. I will read their poems alongside the work of Kathleen Ossip, the founding editor of the poetry review website *SCOUT* and author of three volumes and a chapbook of poetry. Within the Protestant–Catholic divide that marks Western Christianity in the United States, Ossip's work takes on a special significance: Similar to other contemporary (crypto-)Catholic US-American women poets such as April Bernard and Martha Serpas, her work displays a sustained engagement with the after-effects of Catholic spirituality.[14] The main topic of her latest collection, *The Do-Over* (2015), is the phenomenon of death, which she addresses from the perspective of faith.

Notably, all three poets engage a sacred dimension that does not impose its religiosity upon the reader in the way pious or devotional poetry does. Rather, these poets conceal predominant religious motifs and clear denominational markers behind the Cold War experience and behind a spiritual veneer that could be misread as too general and vague. Reading their poems alongside one another in view of their different Christian backgrounds helps understand the significance of the Protestant–Catholic divide in Western Christianity, a tension reflected in the binary worldviews of the Cold War. Poetry thus functions as a mirror of theological developments. The unique quality of their works derives from their proximity to biblical text, which reveals itself only upon close readings of single poems within larger poetry cycles and with an eye to the authors' oeuvres. Overall, their poems may be seen as part of a trend of sacralization, characterizing much of contemporary literature, which is discreetly colored by religious, especially Judeo-Christian, motifs and allusions. However, the current cultural paradigm often glosses over these dimensions of poetry.

This neglect of religious meanings is exacerbated by contemporary views of religion and current trends in scholarly publishing—which emphasize ethnicity, culture, and form rather than spirituality, religion, and theology. Such revisions of our interpretations of poetry are, however, crucial to the field of American studies. After all, the systematic analysis of the history and interpretation of poetry adds to our knowledge about the historical conditions that shaped American studies in the post-war era. Re-calibrating our critical approach, in turn, helps us understand the field's objectives and driving forces. The insights thus gained are especially relevant

at a time when the field's tendency to focus primarily on the United States' relation to Europe is being recalibrated.[15] Current approaches which attempt to counteract this transatlantic bias explore transpacific, transequatorial, hemispheric, and post-national dimensions.[16] Contemporary American poetry may play an important role in this project.[17]

What is striking about the poetry cycles of Lee, Kim, and Ossip is how they convey mystical experience through traumatic personal experiences. Czesław Miłosz has distinguished the twentieth-century poet from the reporter and described the poet's relation to the wealth of material, knowledge, and facts as requiring a "distillation of material."[18] Drawing on this notion, poetry offers a concise form which allows witnesses to draw on the silence that faith demands. In this sense, poetry becomes the voice arising from the silence of the seventh day of Creation and its aftermath to praise the Lord; this form of witnessing is about the communicative function of silence in imitating Christ as much as it is about the human incapacity of faith and the insignificance of human words in the face of God's Word.

Lee's, Kim's, and Ossip's works belong to a larger movement in twentieth-century poetry that I would like to call "new sacred poetry." This type of poetry seeks to find new forms to express religious sensibilities of modernity.[19] Silence is a key means of expression in this context. To be sure, silence may be considered a defining feature of poetry more generally, but numerous experiences of the twentieth century reinforced its centrality—experiences that led to a mystic attitude, renewed interest in biblical text, and a search for spiritual truth growing out of a sense of disillusionment.

Notably, while the term "new sacred poetry" has been used to refer to different literary and poetic renewals since the beginning of the Christian era, it has so far not been applied to contemporary American poetry, for which the aesthetic dimension of suffering, the literary channeling of pain, has prompted a religious reaction, as poets have responded to suffering with a voice of faith. In new sacred poetry, traces of Cold War politics introduce political, societal, and personal circumstances that bring about pain, which causes a questioning of faith. Hence, witnessing draws on its biblical and theological roots: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."[20] According to traditional interpretations, this New Testament passage leaves open whether the Old Testament heroes of faith introduced in the previous chapter are now watching or "witnessing" believers' lives and whether they witnessed to their faith by their words and lives.[21] New sacred poetry responds to this question (i.e., whether the Old Testament heroes of faith are now watching or "witnessing" believers' lives)

by reflecting on the existence of an afterworld, rather than by focusing only on historical events of the poets' personal experience in the twentieth century. Hence, new sacred poetry provides an eschatological perspective on the future that is inspired by a theological, textual, biblical past. Trauma constitutes the psychological motivation for such transgenerational reflections.

These elements of trauma, transgenerational reflection, and a theological perspective on time can be found in the works of the three poets I will examine in this article. Ossip's award-winning debut volume, *The Search Engine* (2002),[22] shows a religious penchant as well as a concern with the twentieth century as a subject of poetry in poems such as "My 20th Century," "Rose of Sharon," and "The Witness." Her exploration of the nexus of faith and history in these poems set the stage for her more focused engagement with the Cold War in more recent collections. In "My 20th Century," the female voice of the poem addresses her mother on the subject of religion in a monological conversation over tea:

> Ma, I say, there's this
> guy who says all religions
> derive from a shared mythology.
> What do you think? She
> swivels and rides
> away on her trike.[23]

The dialogical nature of this poem establishes a connection to the Cold War because the daughter asks her mother questions about developments in the early twentieth century, which the daughter views from her perspective of somebody born after the Second World War. The daughter represents a younger female voice speaking from Cold War times, raising several questions concerning its prehistory.

The topic of religion recurs in the prose poem "Rose of Sharon," demonstrating that Judeo-Christian theology and faith have a bearing on the twentieth century when looked at from its end: "The Lord lifted up his hand and gave her a forlorn hope: … Love of the least sentimental kind."[24] The poem "The Witness" engages with politics and death from a religiously informed perspective, while "On Political Crisis" from Ossip's most recent collection, *The Do-Over*, uses the typographic device of crossed-out words for emphasis, in this case the central theological term "grace":

> ~~Grace~~ Success consists in ignoring
> what you don't like, as a bunny
>
> leaps past tinfoil
> in his search for greens.[25]

These poems mark their connection to the Cold War by their turns of phrase and use of words. For example, words such as "posturing" and "reordering" (used in "On Political Crisis") began to be used more frequently during the Cold War. Through manifold references, Ossip's poems reflect the formative years of her own linguistic socialization during the Cold War, thereby drawing attention to the extent to which the Cold War was also a war of words, a war in which a new vocabulary for critique spread and created a "new language of universal values, the power of which each mirrored the enemy's weaker points."[26] "In the Atrium," the opening poem of *The Search Engine*, presents a speaker's "pure experience" and observations of street scenes and people in Manhattan, for example amid "the marmoreal yet midwestern hauteur of the lobby bar / of the opulence-is-democracy-in-action Times Square hotel." Within this scenery appears a couple, he with a "face toothsome as an olive, eyes Slavonic."[27] These observations and references continue toward the end of the cycle in a poem with a similar setting and tone, "57th Street," which mentions Chagall, focuses on "six laquered Russian nesting dolls," and ends with the anaphoric couplet "You're already nostalgic for the twenty-first century. / You tense for the tractable what-happens-next."[28] Subtle but persistent allusions such as these set the stage for her continuous poetic exploration of the connectedness and difference between East and West later to be explored with a topical focus on the Cold War. This political turn in her poetry takes inspiration from the Confessional poets, as demonstrated by her "Ballade Confessionelle," which is subtitled "*(Plath and Sexton)*." Two lines in this poem capture the haunted character of the political situation during the Cold War: "The world is full of enemies. / I could not stop looking."[29]

In a recent article, Ossip makes her understanding of the political dimension of poetry explicit: "In fact, poetry is the only utterly free space for language that I'm aware of, and that is what makes it indispensable to me, and also what makes writing it and reading it a political act."[30] Her interest in poetry as a political act evolved into a book-length engagement with the Cold War.[31] Despite its title, *The Cold War*, the theme surfaces only indirectly aside from the closing title poem. The section titled "I will be your country soon" from the poem "American History (A Fearsome Solitude)" consists of two parts of comparable length that are divided by "or—." The first part represents physical and mental torment, perhaps even torture of a female, through a third-person lyrical I:

> Now she was thrown smack up against—
> Why doest Thou hurt the already hurting?
> was a serious question, asked in the wired
> bucket, in the tired barrel, in a voice of abiding—

A weird sort of serious yarn: *the big C or*
maybe just a bruise, an undistinguished imitator.
She made a journey of herself, she assumed
the position of a snail, she wept, she sought counsel:

Use them willingly, shrink from none of them!
Three drops of blood, nerve pain of surpassing—
and no sincere effort, no methodology thwarted.
Try to accept that you may have an—

Try to admit the possibility.
Some people, however, carry this too far by—[32]

In the second line quoted above, the use of Early Modern English introduces a biblical tone which evokes the King James Version. The line recalls both the covenantal language of Genesis and the despair of Job,[33] while the rest of this section disrupts the comfortable position of the reader by combining imagery of physical violence ("Now she was thrown smack up against") with the suffering caused by cancer ("*the big C*"), thus raising theological questions concerning present societal concerns.

The second part of the poem assumes a more reflective, first-person stance:

In the beginning was the first person singular. I thought my words meant something. Then I saw a thin pinched face that looked as if it had once suffered great pain.

The storm burst, and—motivation, action, result. A squalid past, but it wasn't mine. I don't see any way around it—will have to tell the truth.

Tilted and then righted. Strained and then blew it. Vulnerable does not equal deep. Literature does not equal the way out.

A time will come when these pins and needles shall not bother me no more. Compassion. Enchantment. And sing an outside song:

The snow is plopping down, in clods, beyond my window. It venerates the knots of trees. Promises a pillow.[34]

Ossip's discontinuous style emphasizes surprise. At every turn, a new unexpected aspect is introduced, keeping the reader on the edge but at the same time involved through an array of familiar textual allusions and references. Beyond the meta-literary critique characteristic of post-war poetic sensibilities, epitomized by the sentence "Literature does not equal the way out," Ossip elevates this critique to the realm of the theological: "In the beginning was the first person singular" refers

to Creation and New Creation in Genesis,[35] a passage echoed in Hebrews,[36] and the opening of the Gospel of John ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.").[37] Thus, the poem imitates the typological structure of the Bible, as its first part refers to Old Testament passages, while the second section opens with a New Testament reference. The two sections are tellingly separated by the word "or—," which is aligned to the left side of the page together with the title of the section, "I will be your country soon." Tying both testaments together in an awkwardly idiosyncratic, politicized version of Judeo-Christian syncretism, Ossip's work is an excellent example of the Old Testament turn in recent contemporary American poetry. She links these biblical references, in the overall context of the cycle, to a critique of both the potential self-centeredness of literature and the postwar individualism which undermines societal cohesion. The veiled biblical subtext becomes instrumental to her poetry's gesturing toward ethical questions of the recent past.

"American History," exemplifies the concern with Creation and New Creation which characterizes Ossip's poetry more generally. Ossip's cycle mimics a basic biblical structure, as the final poem in *The Cold War*, the eponymous "The Cold War," takes on a prophetic tone, similar to Revelation in the New Testament, whereas the first poem of the cycle, "The Human Mind," looks toward the past with its opening words "In those days." Throughout her cycle, Ossip employs remarkable language to evoke the glaring surfaces and particularities of everyday life during the Cold War, thereby creating a textual fabric embedded in the time frame indicated by the cycle's title. Reflections on experiencing the divine capture the irony of latent tendencies toward the binary worldview characteristic of the era: "Sometimes it was hard to figure out how to be sincere" is a line at the beginning of a series of poems centering on "The Status Seekers."[38]

Religious allusions do not end there, though: "the truth" mentioned in the "I will be your country soon" section of "American History" reinforces the connection with New Creation and Jesus as "the way, and the truth, and the life."[39] The "storm" that "burst" alludes both to the deluge in Genesis when "the fountains of the great deep burst forth" and to Jesus calming the storm in the synoptic gospels.[40] "[P]ins and needles" references techniques of maleficent harming effigies of the victim, which marks both early modern witchcraft persecutions and contemporary witchcraft, and evokes torture as a technique used in twentieth-century warfare and policy. Since torture was an integral part of the early modern witchcraft persecutions and the first half of the section titled "I will be your country soon" describes a torture scene, this section of the poem offers a powerful reflection on torture in historical perspective. Yet the allusion to torture remains indirect, as "pins and needles" simultaneously alters the tone of the poem by leading readers away from the depiction of

physical pain (inflicted on a woman) that marks its first part toward a more abstract and distant reflection on past events and concepts such as "pain," "truth," "literature," "Compassion," and "Enchantment." After all, "pins and needles" also evokes the phrase "to be on pins and needles," the more common meaning of nervous anxiety or "a state of agitated suspense and extreme uneasiness."[41] The image of projected guilt and scapegoating conjured by the reference to witchcraft nevertheless leads to the concluding image of snow, biblically denoting innocence, turning the "drops of blood" mentioned in the first part of the poem into a promise of forgiveness according to Isaiah: "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."[42]

Following a series of biblical and historical allusions, Ossip ends her unusual reading of the fearsome solitude of American history in the twentieth century. The tormented woman of the first part represents perhaps the victims of US-American imperial aggression. As the poem adopts a prophetic voice in both its stylistic and allusive references to the biblical text, the prophetic function of the woman in Revelation comes to mind, supported by the use of "[t]hou hurt," which also occurs in Revelation.[43] The allusion to the Book of Psalms and its reference to salvation with the line "sing an outside song" may be read as both reinforcement of the biblical reference and an ironic critique of Judeo-Christian American imperialist tendencies.[44]

The prophetic tone of "A time will come when these pins and needles shall not bother me no more. Compassion. Enchantment" demonstrates how new sacred poetry incorporates contemporary theological critiques of superficial compassion and of idolizing the suffering of others, here in a particularly ironic tone. Patricia Snow has critiqued this idolizing from a Christian perspective, as she considers it a misguided interpretation of Western Christianity by overemphasizing the individual and treating empathy and symbolic compassion to be more important than charity and fearless passion.[45] Such superficial features of compassion are precisely the target of Ossip's critique, which she articulates by blending biblical allusion and biting irony.

Such an ironical tone also occurs—if to a much lesser extent—in Suji Kwock Kim's work, which is equally replete with biblical allusions. In her poetry collection *Notes from the Divided Country* (2003), Kim reflects on the Cold War in view of her family history and her traumatic war experiences in the wake of the division of Korea.[46] Chronicling a life similar to hers from the point of view of a female voice from before her birth to adulthood, Kim memorializes past suffering from a mystical perspective. Biblically inflected, her cycle interweaves the genesis of the individual and that of the world, moving from a poem based on Genesis at the beginning to a poem on

the Book of Revelation at the end, reflecting immigrant experience and history, as the titles of her poems of the first section of her cycle make clear: "Generation," "The Tree of Unknowing," "The Tree of Knowledge," "Middle Kingdom," and "Translations from the Mother Tongue." In a cry of despair, her poem "The Tree of Knowledge" responds to the atrocities of the Korean War by invoking the Book of Psalms and the Book of Job in a prayer before turning to irony, similar to Ossip's voice:

> *Lord, how long wilt thou hide thy face?* [Job 13:24]
> *Why should we be patient, when death lies at the end like the fruit of life?*
> *Why didst thou bring me forth from the womb?* [Job 10:18]
>
> Seek and ye shall
> seek: I wanted to die, but death
> is no remedy for having been born.[47]

"Seek and ye shall / seek" inverts Matthew ("Seek, and ye shall find") to reinforce Job's despair and the lament of the thirteenth Psalm.[48] In other poems, Kim links this tone of prayer with the atrocities of the Korean War, again with reference to biblical precept. Thus, one reads the following passage in the long poem "Fragments from the Forgotten War," which is dedicated to her father and stands at the center of her collection:

> I'll never forget the smell of burning flesh.
> I'll never forget the stench of open sores, pus, gangrene,
> the smell of people rotting who hadn't died yet:
>
> or the cries of the wounded moaning without morphine,
> a boy sinking his teeth into his arm
> to take his mind off the gash that ripped his stomach,
> biting down and down until you saw bone glinting through
> like teeth in a mass grave.

In the last lines, the voice of the poem returns to this boy as an indelible memory:

> I think of that boy biting his arm
> who didn't live through the night,
> wild dogs gnawing at his skull in the morning, his whole face an "exit wound":
>
> I think of a carcass foaming with maggots, the bone black with hatching flies.[49]

Referring to the last lines of Charles Olson's poem "The Kingfishers" (1949) through the allusion to Samson finding honey and a swarm of bees in the carcass of the lion he had previously slain,[50] the end of this poem takes up Olson's "maggots," adding "hatching flies" to underscore the atrocity of the scene. The poem hence suggests

that humanity has "progressed" or further declined since the war with respect to violence and inhumanness. The last line links the proto-Cold War moment of 1949 (the year Olson's poem was published) to a retrospective reflection on the Korean War, insisting that cruelty persists and will consistently reappear.

Inscribing the war experience into the story of Samson's marriage,[51] and vice versa, emphasizes the ways in which violence and cruelty are related to gender. It also turns the promise contained in the Samson story into a fatal, accusing prophecy that results from the forgetfulness surrounding the Korean War in Western cultural memory. Finally, the flies recall the false God of Ekron, Baal-zebub, as the Lord of Flies,[52] identifying the devilish nature of war, "a war between gods who weren't gods," as stated earlier in the poem. The line references the plurality of gods in Genesis and reinforces the allusion through repeated use of anaphora and enumeration.

Kim concludes the next poem in the cycle, "Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers," in which the city of Seoul today brings back memories of the war, in a section written from the perspective of old men who may have experienced the war:

> whose spirits could not be broken,
> whose every breath seems to say:
> after things turned to their worst, we began again,
>
> but may you never see what we saw,
> may you never do what we've done,
> may you never remember & may you never forget.[53]

To live with the knowledge of the war is a paradox which seems to suggest that one may self-consciously overcome trauma by embracing it and gaining knowledge from it, drawing ethical consequences for one's own life. This is what Li-Young Lee calls the paradox of the God who acts in history and time and the God of the pure present or mystical encounter.[54] Believing that the two may be reconciled, he presents a similar passage on remembering and forgetting in his collection *Behind My Eyes* (2008):

> And if you're one of those
> whose left side of the face doesn't match
> the right, it might be a clue
>
> looking the other way was a habit
> your predecessors found useful for survival.
> Don't lament not being beautiful.

> Get used to seeing while not seeing.
> Get busy remembering while forgetting.
> Dying to live while not wanting to go on.[55]

This passage is from the second poem of the cycle, "Self-Help for Fellow Refugees," a poem in which the male voice recalls having witnessed his father being arrested as a child—an allusion to the arrest of Lee's father in front of the boy's eyes by the Sukarno regime in Indonesia, an experience that ultimately led to his father's conversion to Christianity. In the poem, the father wants the male voice to see the event and the mother wants to spare the male voice the sight. Even more biblically, "remembering" here is used in the sense of remembering the obligations toward others in the way God remembers the faithful. In Lee's dense inflection of personal experience, poetic expression, and theological reflection, this moment also serves as a reference to his father's conversion, which is the source of his own deeply Christian poetry, which explores the workings of the divine in contemporary history. Lee continues this work in his collection *The Undressing* (2018), where the mystical merger of the divine and the poetic voice rearticulate the bold mysticism of the fourteenth-century Persian poet Khwāja Shams-ud-Dīn Muhammad Hāfez-e Shīrāzī (pen name: Hafez). Lee also turns to the goddess Sophia while invoking the erotic imagery of religious mysticism and extending his preoccupation with "the Word" as another testimony to the influence of his father's Protestantism.

Lee's work is one example of how contemporary American poetry emphasizes Creation and New Creation in response to lived experiences of the Cold War, thereby anticipating a return to the theology of Genesis within contemporary biblical and dogmatic theology. This, in turn, may be a necessary condition for understanding Catholic–Protestant relations during the Cold War. Other Catholic poetic voices of the present, including Kevin Hart,[56] for whom poetry is a medium of theological exploration rather than pious devotion, may serve as helpful points of comparison, both in terms of imagery and theological substance. This poetry reflects the continuous literary struggle with the Protestant–Catholic divide that has characterized a good part of the literary production in the Anglo-American realm. In ways not yet sufficiently realized, the currently dominating readings of poetry (and literature), which neglect their groundedness in biblical text, derive from the sacralization of literature. In this process, the ongoing Catholicization of American Protestantisms—that is, the subtle reversal of the Protestant impetus at the beginning of the New England settlement despite its cultural prominence—seeks and finds literary and poetic expression. In a new admixture of a Protestant interest in the Word and a Catholic turn toward the things and sufferings of this world, new sacred poetry derives much of its energy from its basis in a biblical tradition mediated through a biblically inspired literary (poetic) tradition in English (a tradition built on Catho-

lic–Protestant [re-]conversions and tensions). The lingering force of the Protestant scriptural tradition and influence renders this derivation textual in ways the cultural paradigm is not. This recent turn of poetry toward theology matches the turn of theology to poetry throughout the twentieth century—a turn that, through the sheer force of its literary effectiveness, raises the question to what extent theology is literature's own terms. To put this differently, the poets and their work analyzed here exemplify that poetry that knows itself becomes religion. This notion results from a thoroughly theological perspective on literature which, in the words of Terence Wright, recognizes that "the indirect mode of reference employed in literature constitutes some of the most effective theology."[57] Poetry as the most metaphorically loaded literary genre may be seen to emulate biblical style. In the case of the new sacred poetry, metaphorical strategies coincide and overlap as the poetic language seeks to evoke biblical precept. The readings of the work of Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, and Kathleen Ossip raise the question concerning how poetry itself may be grasped as a kind of theology. Using the term "new sacred poetry," one may consider it to be the place where theology—occasionally and momentarily—finds itself.

Beyond exploring the paradoxes arising from personal experiences in the polarized world of the Cold War, these poets renew the engagement with literature and biblical precept by seeking poetic expression grounded in their spiritual worlds and religious heritages. The study of how their work anticipates contemporary theology opens up an important field of investigation: literature is to be understood with regard to the theological dimension of language and not as an object in the context of cultural identity politics. The new sacred poetry examined here intensifies and redefines the relationship between theology, history, and poetry. Because it condenses and interprets experience in meaningful ways, it may serve as a potent tool to understand how the legacy of the Cold War continues to define the present, and how the fault lines of its history determine the contours of contemporary theology. Contemporary poetry cycles of this kind, which take up the structure of the Bible by opening with an allusion to Genesis and concluding with an allusion to the Book of Revelation, respond to the bias of mid-twentieth century literature that focuses predominantly on the New Testament.[58] The Old Testament is thus reappraised for the purpose of redefining Christian views. The significance of this theological work in the form of poetry should not be underestimated since theologians and philosophers have turned to poetry for its explanatory value regarding questions of the transcendent. New sacred poetry will play an important role in our efforts to understand the field of American studies in the twentieth century not only literarily, culturally, and historically, but also theologically: Through the theological work of their poetry, poets such as Li-Young Lee, Suji Kwock Kim, and Kathleen Ossip link their personal experiences of specific facets of the Cold War to their personal takes on the

religious traditions they inherited. This double honesty toward their religious and spiritual ancestry and the specific historical moment, for which they have developed a precise poetic sensorium, shows the importance of paying heed to (theo) poetic engagements with Cold War culture.

Notes

1 Carolyn Forché, *Against Forgetting: 20th-Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993); Carolyn Forché and Duncan Wu, eds., *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500–2001* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

2 Edward Brunner's anthology *Cold War Poetry* (2001) connects the rise in perception and reception of Cold War poetry to the emergence of creative writing programs and professorships at US universities. Most poets writing retrospectively about the Cold War come out of these programs. Edward Brunner, *Cold War Poetry: The Social Text in the Fifties Poem* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

3 Stephen Voyce, *Poetic Community: Avant-Garde Activism and Cold War Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

4 Peter Middleton, *Physics Envy: American Poetry and Science in the Cold War and After* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

5 Eric Bennett, "Creative Writing and the Cold War University," in *A Companion to Creative Writing*, ed. Graeme Harper (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 377–92.

6 Louise Nelstrop, "Introduction: Remembering and Forgetting the Mystical in Contemporary Theological Discourse," in *Exploring Lost Dimensions in Christian Mysticism: Opening to the Mystical*, ed. Louise Nelstrop und Simon D. Podmore (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 2–3; Wolfgang Kubin, "Fernes Verstehen: Zur Sicht der chinesischen Welt aus deutschem Blick," lecture series "Die Kunst Kulturen zu verstehen: Das Andere im Eigenen," July 17, 2013, *HHU Mediathek*, July 23, 2013, https://mediathek.hhu.de/watch/d6dc0323-d279-445e-86af-e8cf26d9e2aa; Dian Li, *The Chinese Poetry of Bei Dao, 1978–2000: Resistance and Exile* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 27.

7 Oliver Scheiding, "Ideas of Order in Contemporary American Poetry," in *Ideas of Order in Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. Diana von Finck and Oliver Scheiding (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 9, n. 5.

8 See Marc S. Gallicchio, *The Cold War Begins in Asia: American East Asian Policy and the Fall of the Japanese Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Peter Lowe, *Containing the Cold War in East Asia: British Policies Towards Japan, China and Korea, 1948–53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The Cold War in East Asia, 1945–1991* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Xiaobing Li, *The Cold War in East Asia* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2018).

9 See Clemens Six, *Secularism, Decolonisation, and the Cold War in South and Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2018); Dianne Kirby, "Religion and the Cold War: An Introduction," in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1, 20.

10 Axel R. Schäfer, *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 25.

11 Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 440.

12 See Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, *Beyond Literary Chinatown* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Jeffrey F. L. Partridge, "The Politics of Ethnic Authorship: Li-Young Lee, Emerson, and Whitman at the Banquet Table," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 37, no. 1 (2004): 101–26; Jahan Ramazani, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Brigitte Wallinger-Schorn, *"So There it Is": An Exploration of Cultural Hybridity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 78–9, 90–3; Walter S. H. Lim, "Ethnicity and the Southeast Asian Diaspora in Li-Young Lee's *The Winged Seed*," in *Narrating Race: Asia, (Trans)Nationalism, Social Change*, ed. Robbie B. H. Goh (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 69–88; Walter S. H. Lim, *Narratives of Diaspora: Representations of Asia in Chinese American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Steven G. Young, "The Precision of Persimmons: Hybridigty, Grafting and the Case of Li-Young Lee," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 12, no. 1 (2001): 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/10436920108580279; Steven G. Yao, *Foreign Accents: Chinese American Verse from Exclusion to Postethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

13 James Kyung-Jin Lee, "Li-Young Lee," in *Words Matter: Conversations with Asian American Writers*, ed. Cheung King-Kok (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 275, 279.

14 Similar to other contemporary Catholic American poets, the Catholic background of Ossip's work repeatedly comes to the fore. Her early poem "The Complaints of Maria Goretti," for example, reflects on the life of the eponymous Catholic saint (1890–1902). Kathleen Ossip, "The Complaints of Maria Goretti," in *The Search Engine* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), 19–22. Characteristically, this poem also bears the signs of neoformalism typical of (crypto-)Catholic contemporary American poetry. These neoformalist tendencies translate the significance of tradition in the Roman Catholic Church to the field of poetry. *The Search Engine* features two more neoformalist poems: "A Conception" and "The Flat Tire" (50–51; 63–65).

15 Notably, my article also advances an intervention in Cold War history within the field of American studies. This is important insofar as American studies was a product of the Cold War.

16 Laura Bieger, Ramon Saldivar, and Johannes Voelz, eds., *The Imaginary and Its Worlds: American Studies After the Transnational Turn* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013); Harris Feinsod, *The Poetry of the Americas: From Good Neighbors to Countercultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counterpoetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

17 For reasons beyond the scope of this article, I would prefer to replace "American" with "Anglo-American" to designate poetry written in English under the influence of North American culture—the United States, in particular. The term "Anglo-American" transcends national and ethnic boundaries and hence reflects the dynamics of Cold War poetry. In the post-Cold War environment, the numerous creative writing programs in the US and the publishing and teaching circuits of established English-language poets have ensured American poets' global influence. The resultant loose geographic focus represents a unique movement within the landscape of contemporary poetry written

in English. See Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, *Poetry, Print, and the Making of Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 208.

18 Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems, 1931–2001* (New York, NY: Ecco, 2003), xxiii.

19 Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 295.

20 Heb. 12:1, ESV. Unless the poems use the King James Version (KJV), I quote from the English Standard Version (ESV). The use of the KJV is in line with a long literary tradition which makes allusions stand out stylistically, imbuing the poems with a biblical voice colored by Early Modern English. On traces of the KJV in the ESV, see Leland Ryken, *The ESV and the English Bible Legacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

21 English Standard Version: The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Student Study Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 1655.

22 Kathleen Ossip, *The Search Engine* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002).

23 Kathleen Ossip, "My 20th Century," in *The Search Engine* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), 8.

24 Kathleen Ossip, "Rose of Sharon," in *The Search Engine* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), 12.

25 Kathleen Ossip, "On Political Crisis," in *The Do-Over: Poems* (Louisville, KY: Sarabande Books, 2015), 32.

26 Ilya Budraitskis, "The Language of Cold War," *Manifesta Journal* 18 (2015): 57.

27 Kathleen Ossip, "In the Atrium," in *The Search Engine* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), 3–4.

28 Kathleen Ossip, "57th Street," in *The Search Engine* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), 69–72.

29 Kathleen Ossip, "Ballade Confessionelle," in *The Search Engine* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), 11. In *The Search Engine*, Sylvia Plath is also mentioned in the poem "Nobody Talks about the moon anymore." Plath's work appears among the sources of the poems "Ballade Confessionelle" and "Three Prayers." In *The Do-Over*, Plath and Anne Sexton are referred to by their first names in "Lyric," and Sylvia Plath is mentioned in the long prose poem "After." Plath is also the subject of "No use," and Plath's poems "The Moon and the Yew Tree" and "Mirror" are among the "Borrowings" listed in the collection.

30 Kathleen Ossip, "Why All Poems Are Political," *Electric Literature*, June 1, 2017, https://electricliterature.com/why-all-poems-are-political/.

31 Kathleen Ossip, *The Cold War: Poems* (Louisville, KY: Sarabande Books, 2011).

32 Kathleen Ossip, "American History (A Fearsome Solitude)," in *The Cold War: Poems* (Louisville, KY: Sarabande Books, 2011), 12.

33 See Gen. 26:29 and Job 35:4–8.

34 Ossip, "American History," 12.

35 Gen. 1:1.

36 Heb. 1:10.

37 John 1:1.

38 Kathleen Ossip, "The Status Seekers," in *The Cold War: Poems* (Louisville, KY: Sarabande

Books, 2011), 15.

39 John 14:6.

40 Gen. 7:11.

41 "Pin," *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed January 25, 2020, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/144028.

42 Isa. 1:18.

43 Rev. 6:6 (KJV). Revelation alludes to the woman in 2:20, 12:1, 12:4, 12:6, 12:13–7, 17:4–6, 17:7, 17:9, and 17:18.

44 For example, Psalm 98:1 reads: "Oh sing to the Lord a new song."

45 Snow expresses her critique as follows: "In place of Christ's fearless, definite Passion, we offer others our problematic, uneasy pity, a passion from which no one rises incorrupt." She also asks whether it is a "coincidence that in a world that has made a fetish of vicarious suffering, suffering itself—real suffering—has become taboo." Patricia Snow, "Empathy Is Not Charity," *First Things* 276 (2017): 44–6.

46 Suji Kwock Kim, *Notes from the Divided Country: Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

47 Suji Kwock Kim, "The Tree of Knowledge," in *Notes from the Divided Country: Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 11; parenthetical references to Bible verses added by author.

48 Matt. 7:7; Ps. 13:1–6.

49 Suji Kwock Kim, "Fragments from the Forgotten War," in *Notes from the Divided Country: Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 30–2.

50 Judg. 14:8.

51 Judg. 14.

52 2 Kgs. 1:2–3. On the meaning of Baal-zebub as "Lord of flies," see English Standard Version Student Study Bible, 481.

53 Suji Kwock Kim, "Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers," in *Notes from the Divided Country: Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 37.

54 Li-Young Lee, "The Subject Is Silence," in *A God in the House: Poets Talk About Faith*, ed. Ilya Kaminsky and Katherine Towler (North Adams, MA: Tupelo Press, 2012), 126.

55 Li-Young Lee, "Self-Help for Fellow Refugees," in *Behind My Eyes* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 17.

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Dance Script With Electric Ballerina (1983) and *Palladium* (1986), Rigoberto González, *Unpeopled Eden* (2013), Jorie Graham, *Never* (2002), Jason Gray, *Photographing Eden* (2008), Brooks Haxton, *Dominion* (1986), John Newlov, *The Green Plain* (1981), Jacqueline Osherow, *The Hoopoe's Crown* (2005), Anthony Piccione, *For the Kingdom* (1995), Lynn Powell, *The Zones of Paradise* (2003), and Vikram Seth, *Summer Requiem* (2015).

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Poetry as a Strategy for Teaching English

Using Nikki Giovanni's Poetry in the English as a Second-/Foreign-Language Classroom

Maria Proitsaki

Abstract

This article explores ways to introduce and integrate poetry in English classes in the context of second-language education. My aim is to spark interest in contemporary poetry while addressing general perceptions by both teachers and students that poetry is difficult to engage with. I thus argue for an approach that centers on "easier" poems and involves aspects of contemporary popular culture to introduce poetry, help students appreciate it, and eventually engage in creative writing of their own. Furthermore, I suggest ways in which poetry can be integrated in English courses at large, via the inclusion of strings of poems, within their broader cultural contexts, and by linking them to different, more popular cultural forms of expression, such as songs, films, and cartoons. I exemplify this approach by focusing on two poems by African American poet Nikki Giovanni. "Knoxville, Tennessee" and "Nikki-Rosa" are autobiographical poems which offer first-person accounts of the poet's African American cultural background. However, my intertextual approach interconnects these poems with other poems and cultural texts from different parts of the English-speaking world. Ultimately, I suggest that poetry, due to its brevity and open-endedness, can enhance the study of the English language and Anglophone cultures in a variety of ways beyond the close study of verse in terms of aesthetics.

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Maria Proitsaki

My interest in how poetry is used in the classroom springs from my personal experience as a humanities student and an English language and literature instructor in different educational contexts in two European countries, Greece and Sweden. As a high school and university student in Greece, I was exposed to poetry extensively. In school, the theoretical direction involved the study of poetry on a weekly basis, with scheduled in-depth analyses of a variety of poems from ancient to modern Greek. At university, literature courses had large poetry segments and there were specialization courses on the work of specific poets, such as a term-long women's poetry course on Adrienne Rich, Denise Levertov, and Sylvia Plath.

In contrast, in Sweden, poetry usually constitutes a small part of survey literature courses and individual poems receive little attention. Noting this absence of poetry and convinced of the importance of poems as objects of study from linguistic, literary, and cultural perspectives, as I started research on the work of Nikki Giovanni and Rita Dove, I would often mark poems that could be taught together, or used in different contexts and for different purposes. But when I started teaching, my efforts to include poetry collections in my courses met with obstacles, such as arguments over the cost of these slim volumes and questions about the rationale behind substituting great novels for poems. To make matters worse, students were rarely excited to deal with poetry. In an attempt to bypass administrative requirements and the students' general lack of enthusiasm to engage with poetry, I devised strategies to assign poetry, help my students learn to enjoy poems and, in some cases, even write verse of their own.

My aim in this paper is to discuss ways which facilitate and enhance the introduction and study of poetry in the English classroom. My pedagogical approach is similar to David Hanauer's in "Meaningful Literacy: Writing Poetry in the Language Classroom" (2012), in which he situates poetry in the second-language classroom "within a process of personal exploration of memory and the expression of personal understanding and insight," and seeks to reach a point at which "a second language ceases to be a tool and becomes a personal resource and an 'owned' language."[1] I focus on methodological aspects of using poetry in second-/foreign-language (EFL) courses, reading and writing, and introductory literature courses, thus leaving aside the larger theoretical discussion concerning the benefits of exposing students to the study of poems and having them practice creative writing.[2] In other words, my aim is to suggest ideas for the inclusion of poems in a rather broad sense, and focus on creative writing as part of diverse classroom activities by highlighting the importance of studying poetry and engaging in creative writing in the learning of the English language without aspiring to debate or add critical viewpoints about how or why poetry and creative writing may be beneficial. First, I address the issue that students do not "like" poetry in general and that teachers rarely incorporate poems in their lesson plans. In a second step, I explore how poetry can be introduced to English classes as well as used in creative writing projects. I focus primarily on American poets and in particular on Nikki Giovanni, but, of course, other poetry may be used instead. Similarly, while my work concentrates on university-level courses, including teacher education programs, in which working with poems has been part of lesson plan activities in both literary and linguistic contexts, my suggestions can also be of relevance for (upper) secondary school levels.

Unpopular Poetry

The idea that poetry is unpopular is widely accepted. "Contemporary poetry is, to put it mildly, unpopular, and that unpopularity may be increasing," writes David Orr in a review of Ben Lerner's *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016), adding that surveys of Americans' reading habits show that poetry readership has decreased by two-thirds since 1992.[3] In his work, Lerner suggests a reason for people's negative attitude toward poetry: "Since language is the stuff of the social, and poetry the expression in language of our irreducible individuality, our personhood is tied up with our poethood." He notes that while verse is present in childhood and adolescence, adults tend to "fall away" from poetry and that there is a sense of embarrassment because "having to acknowledge one's total alienation from poetry chafes against the early association of poem and self."[4] In an interview with Michael Clune, Lerner adds that due to the belief that one is a poet "by virtue of being human," not being a poet causes feelings of exclusion and resentment.[5] According to Lerner, a disdain for poetry lies

within the art form itself.

On a similar note, during a November 2015 webinar conducted under the auspices of the Project on the History of Black Writing at the University of Kansas, the African American poet Jericho Brown discussed people's strange approach and relationship to poetry. People say they like music, Brown argued, although they are likely to enjoy only some kinds of music; they may be listening to music absentmindedly until a song they enjoy comes on the radio, but then this single song becomes a confirmation that they do, indeed, like music. In contrast, people claim they do not like poetry because they happen to have disliked some poems. In other words, they do not approach poetry as they do music and their attitude toward poems might be different if their expectations regarding poetry were more open.[6]

But poetry requires a higher degree of commitment and effort, and its accessibility is an issue to be considered. For poems to be enjoyed, the reader needs to pay attention and to have some general knowledge in order to relate to their content and form. Poetry is often challenging to readers "because it provides only minimal or indirect information through which to produce understanding," notes Hanauer.[7] In educational settings, students perceive poetry to be "difficult, irrelevant, boring and out of date." This perception is reflected in the reaction of educators who refrain from engaging in poetry and argue that it is "difficult to read and so distant from the students."[8]

The perspectives that make teachers in Sweden hesitant to integrate poetry into their teaching of English are similar. In a paper including a very small qualitative survey addressing upper secondary school teachers in Halland, Kim Haraldsson examines the "diminishing role" of poetry in the classroom and sheds some light on why teachers choose to focus on poetry—or not. Haraldsson explains that the study of poems is less time-consuming and thus more suitable for language classes. Moreover, teachers have the opportunity to assign literary texts of their choice and nevertheless comply with the guidelines of Skolverket (the Swedish National Agency for Education), which prioritize fiction and drama. Most teachers refrain, however, from using poetry, according to Harladsson, if they are not personally interested in it, often citing (but not problematizing) their students' resistant attitude to poems as affecting their choices.[9]

While Haraldsson's study points to the diminished attention paid to poetry in upper secondary level English classes, it also asserts that introducing poetry successfully to students depends on a teacher's "genuine interest" in poetry.[10] Citing the research of Bill Overton, who has diagnosed a trend in higher education to downplay the value of teaching poetry,[11] Haraldsson acknowledges that students' resistance to poetry precipitates a similar resistance to introduce poetry when

they have become teachers. On the other hand, students who consider the study of poetry essential are the ones who later afford poetry its due space in their lessons.[12]

There is then a circular pattern whereby an education student's dismissive attitudes to poetry, when they remain unchallenged, are likely to foster even more persistent resistance to the study of poems and further contribute to perceptions of poetry as uninteresting, irrelevant, and unimportant. In fact, Overton speaks of "an increasing ignorance" when it comes to poetry, as teachers pass on their resistance to poetry to their students.[13] Obviously, if interest in poetry is to be cultivated, challenging these negative attitudes is imperative. In my view, this can take place on any level, with the gradual introduction of the study of verse and via creative writing. After all, exploring poems in the classroom can occur by emphasizing a variety of possible "language and culture" aspects and adapting the critical approach to various educational contexts.

Alleviating Resistance

In view of anticipated student resistance, the introduction of poems to the classroom needs to be negotiated. By now, introducing poetry via song lyrics and audiovisual sources is a rather established method, since students are likely to respond more positively to texts and media they see as contemporary and exciting. Arguing that classroom activities should be "meaningful" to students, Hanauer recounts the experience of a teacher candidate who initially met little enthusiasm when she announced to her class that they would read poems, only to realize that when she tried to come to poetry more indirectly instead, via rap, she could capture the students' attention and their interest far more easily.[14] Similarly, Haraldsson has found that in order to link poetry to students' lives, Swedish teachers who work with poems use relevant films and videos of poetry readings.[15] Even Carol Jago, whose book *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom* (1999) offers some insightful perspectives that I discuss below, writes about how intrigued her students are when they learn that Giovanni dedicated her *Love Poems* (1997) to rap singer Tupac Shakur (1971–1996) and how eager they become to get hold of the book, wondering who this woman who knew Tupac was.[16]

Sidetracking may be necessary in order to bring poems to a class so that students do not feel alienated, but accessing poetry via popular music is, in my view, not always viable. While there are many songwriters whose lyrics are poetry-like, these are often easier to use with older students. The poetic song lyrics of Nobel Laureate Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Neil Young, and Patti Smith, among others, are not very appealing to the young, while the popular culture songs they appreciate instead are often written in plain language. As much as they object to the idea of reading

a poem, younger students tend to be against listening to more complex songs. In my experience, even the texts of quite popular contemporary artists, such as Kendrick Lamar and Radiohead, fare poorly. Opting for song lyrics of the students' choice, on the other hand, generally results in banal and repetitive texts. A (non-academic) study comparing the word count of the songs of some of the most popular music artists in recent years has shown that the songs' textual complexity diminishes and their language often matches early primary school levels. The fairly straightforward lyrics are simply less complicated than standard poetry.[17]

Ultimately, in order to work with poems, one needs to demythologize the difficulty of poetry while encouraging and promoting the sense of achievement that arises when students have dealt with poems they initially perceived as inaccessible—after all, it is this sense of achievement that potentially propels further positive responses to poetry. In order to demythologize the difficult nature of poetry, teachers could start with readings of short and straightforward poems such as Gwendolyn Brooks's "We Real Cool" (1960) and Maya Angelou's "Harlem Hopscotch" (1971), which are easily accessible online, or begin with extracts from more challenging ones, such as T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (1845), which exist in various popular culture formats (animation, comics, readings by famous actors or singers, etc.) and are readily available on YouTube. It is a good starting point to take advantage of the fact that verse is (or can be) integrated in many aspects of life and already exists in materials that are considered viable, and that poetry can be combined with other texts to give more personal perspectives.

Nikki Giovanni's Poetry in the EFL Classroom

Turning to Giovanni's work, I will discuss the use of her poetry in EFL teaching contexts, especially with a creative writing focus. Many of Giovanni's poems are fine examples of poetic texts to be studied by non-native students because they tend to be rather concise and accessible, while they afford specific perspectives on American life and culture in view of their thematic take on relevant social issues. They are, moreover, as Jago claims, appropriate models for creative writing exercises.[18] I will exemplify how one can work with a couple of Giovanni's widely anthologized poems—her autobiographical "Knoxville, Tennessee" (1968) and "Nikki-Rosa" (1968). Jago's approach to these poems in *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom* is situated in the context of poetry as an artform and addresses native speakers who are acquainted with African American culture. While based on some of Jago's insights, my approach is meant to be used in EFL learning contexts. In accordance with the core content guidelines set by the Swedish National Agency for Education,[19] studying "Knoxville, Tennessee" may highlight its personal dimensions (regarding poet and reader) and/

or its sociocultural conditions and intertextual references. In either case, instructors can integrate aspects of language and creative writing into their discussion of the poem.

"Knoxville, Tennessee" is one of several poems by Giovanni that has been turned into a children's book, illustrated by Larry Johnson.[20] Moreover, there is a YouTube video which combines the poem with the song "Cruise" by Florida Georgia Line (2012) and pictures which provide helpful visual clues to the poem's vocabulary. Introducing the poem in either of these formats is likely to make it more appealing to students.[21] In addition, the city of Knoxville may be introduced by way of a short video in order to link the poem to its geographic setting—several travel destination videos about Knoxville are available on YouTube. Furthermore, the "Teach this Poem" initiative on the poets.org website provides a lesson plan which suggests reading the poem alongside the music video of "Wade in the Water" by The Blind Boys of Alabama (2002).[22]

"Knoxville, Tennessee" is short and simple in its language and structure, but its word choice is exceptional, and it is rich in imagery and theme: childhood memories, family, food, leisure, summer, traditions, comfort, belonging, home, rural place, and place at large:

> I always like summer
> Best
> you can eat fresh corn
> From daddy's garden
> And okra
> And greens
> And cabbage
> And lots of
> Barbeque
> And buttermilk
> And homemade ice-cream
> At the church picnic
> And listen to
> Gospel music
> Outside
> At the church
> Homecoming
> And go to the mountains with
> Your grandmother
> And go barefooted
> And be warm[23]

Some biographical information about the poet can help students contextual-

ize Giovanni's particular relation to Knoxville, as it is the city she grew up in with her maternal grandparents and the place she calls home. Giovanni addresses Knoxville's significance in *Gemini* (1971), especially in the volume's first essay, "400 Mulvaney Street," in which she narrates her return "home" to Knoxville, Tennessee. This is the place the poet also claims as a home for her son—so that he knows that they "come from somewhere," and "belong."[24] This background emphasizes the specificity of the African American kinship experience, with its fundamental and benevolent influence on the individual in the face of racial inequality and struggle, along with the importance of home and rural life as crucial sources of energy.

In the poem, Giovanni remembers her childhood as a summer day when she could enjoy fresh vegetables from her "daddy's garden" (fresh corn, okra greens, and cabbage), the food "at the church picnic" (barbecue, buttermilk, and homemade ice-cream), the sounds of gospel, wandering barefooted and feeling warm. In just a few lines, Giovanni weaves empowering references to a peaceful and pleasurable existence, which, historically, could never be taken for granted by African Americans, into the poem's textual body. The foods she lists are soul food, the definition of which links the nurturing of the body to the nurturing of the soul in community with others and which acknowledges the imperative of embracing one's heritage: "all soul food technicians usually listen to gospel music when they are preparing the meals," Michael Harriot explains. He adds that "[t]o qualify for soul food consideration, the cook must also be an aunt, uncle, grandfather or grandmother. It doesn't have to be a blood aunt, but there must be someone who refers to the cook as Aunt Wilma or Uncle Charles."[25] Between the lines, the poetic persona challenges the stereotypical association of African American men with violence and criminality. In the poem, "daddy's" soul food stands for sound familial bonds and celebrates collective survival in the face of the adversities that have always defined African American life. As such, the poem offers personal information and draws on cultural contexts and can thus be used to probe reflection, discussion, and writing on, for example, the life-sustaining dimension of linking personhood to the communal, or any other of the abovementioned topics.

Jago presents the way she works with "Knoxville, Tennessee" in a section titled "Turning Students' Own Lives into Art" and describes that she challenges students first to guess about the poet's life and then invites them to write "a poem of their own about something, someplace, or someone they like best."[26] Prior to this task, some preparatory work is required, I would argue. Here, Jago's approach to "Nikki-Rosa," another early childhood poem and perhaps Giovanni's most famous,[27] becomes relevant.

"Nikki-Rosa" is a more complex poem, as it problematizes what people might con-

sider a "hard childhood" by juxtaposing daily hardships with memories of being happy and feeling loved. In the poem, Giovanni remembers holiday gatherings and everyday pleasures: "how happy you were to have / your mother / all to yourself" and also (in a house that did not have an indoor toilet) "how good the water felt when you got your bath / from one of those / big tubs folk in chicago barbecue in." She then focuses on the importance of her family holding together, understanding and supporting each other, beyond hardships and poverty. Poverty, she notes, and her parents' fights due to her father's drinking are insignificant; instead, she highlights their togetherness and love, a love that is inexplicable to white people:

> And though you're poor it isn't poverty that
> concerns you
> and though they fought a lot
> it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference
> but only that everybody is together and you
> and your sister have happy birthdays and very good
> Christmases
> and I really hope no white person ever has cause
> to write about me
> because they never understand
> Black love is Black wealth and they'll
> probably talk about my hard childhood
> and never understand that
> all the while I was quite happy[28]

"Black love is Black wealth" presents a powerful statement which summarizes the poet's ideological standpoint through seemingly banal language. In the poem, Giovanni expands the personal, its immediacy denoted in the narrator's "you," toward the familial and the communal, highlighting the transformative potential of assertive will. Keith Leonard has accordingly argued that Giovanni's exaltation of togetherness signals her eagerness "to redeem suffering or even to sublimate it." The poet's "Black love," is, in this sense, "a principle of emotional health and affirmation that both motivates this necessary, chosen togetherness and is created and sustained by it."[29]

African American daily life is thus validated through the expression of a girl's perspective, the perspective of the poet-to-be. Virginia C. Fowler has noted that Giovanni introduces "Nikki-Rosa" with anecdotes to show the kind of values her parents aspired to convey to their children. Although their house lacked modern plumbing facilities, "it contained hundreds of books as well as a piano," and Giovanni's parents succeeded in making their children "feel that whatever they had was best."[30] The material conditions along with the strong family bonds she experienced as a child in an economically disadvantaged but emotionally rich domestic environment

shaped the poet's beliefs and her ethics later in her life. In the poem, however, these material conditions are backgrounded, as the poet claims the right to embrace her past and tell her story in the way she wants it to be remembered.[31]

The Center for Civic Reflection website suggests an approach to the poem which concentrates on the themes of "Diversity and Difference, Heritage and Tradition, Race, Ethnicity and Culture."[32] While addressing a wider public in the United States, the discussion questions provided can be used in EFL learning contexts to emphasize the poem's socio-historical and cultural dimensions, especially in relation to the students' own experiences. For example, the students may be asked to consider why childhood memories are "always a drag/if you're Black," why white biographers are not expected to describe the speaker's happy childhood, and whether it is possible to "separate assumptions from the reality of another's background"—and how this may be achieved. Furthermore, students may be invited to discuss what knowledge about the background of someone might mean, whether sharing one's race is crucial to understanding their experiences, and whether there are factors beyond race which shape the understanding of others.

Jago uses "Nikki-Rosa" to have students reflect on their own "hard childhood" memories. As part of a "biography writing" task, she makes them interview each other about things they like or prepare to interview a famous person about things they like. Students note down questions they need to ask and their own reflections after having been interviewed themselves. Last, students write about each other either in prose or verse. The same process may also be applied to "Knoxville, Tennessee."

Inspired by Jago's approach, my instructions to students include the following:

(1) Explorations of the personal: Write a list of some things you have always liked or enjoyed doing. (Reflect on why.)
(2) Happy childhood memories: Is there any personal experience that the poem made you think about?
(3) Interview each other about things you like, or your memories: What questions would you ask to elicit meaningful responses?
Prepare a set of questions—ask and note down the answers.
Answer your peer's questions focusing on using well-chosen words. Explain your answers. (Reflect on: How much are you willing to share and why/why not? Do you expect your peer to understand?)
Report your peer's responses. (Reflect on the experience of being interviewed. Where your thoughts represented fairly?)
(4) Return to your list of things you like and try to write down a short text, perhaps similar to Giovanni's poem, mentioning what you find enjoyable. Whether you wish to explain or simply list what you like is your choice.

The first three tasks are guidelines that can be assigned for work with either of the poems. When a class has worked in pairs or groups, interviewing each other and writing about their peers' preferences, the task to reflect on and write about one's own circumstances can be nuanced and detailed. Students can be asked to think about places that are significant to them, events, situations, or experiences that have made an impression on them, foods and traditions they enjoy, or people that matter in their lives. The last task, however, applies best to "Knoxville, Tennessee." Following the poem's form, the students can try to express (and rationalize) their choices from within a range of alternatives, listing relevant and, as Jago advises, "exceptionally well chosen" words, or short phrases.[33] If some happen to share interests, they may engage in creating group or class poems by combining their individual contributions into a joint text.[34] While the primary focus of this writing task is communicative, in the process of composing their texts, the students could be encouraged to consider their vocabulary use and asked to provide alternative wording or to address sentence structure issues by focusing on instances of (desired) ellipsis in verse.

The resulting poems, predictably, vary in quality. Jago offers some examples of verse produced by her students, including the following: "I always like it when I see a pretty girl / You can look at her body / and smile / and legs / and breasts."[35] In an online presentation of such a class project based on "Knoxville, Tennesse," students describe their favorite places.[36] Most of the examples avoid mistakes commonly made by amateur poets: the layering of adjectives, the use of clichés, forced rhyme, and multi-syllabic words.[37] Exercises which I have conducted informally with Swedish students have yielded similar results.

Whether these poems are to be circulated or not among the students is a decision to be made in view of class dynamics. Jago has her students read the poems in class and discuss how it feels to share thoughts and details of one's life. In Swedish contexts, circulating texts anonymously at first and having students read random poems works better than reading one's own poems in class, which is often considered embarrassing. Students are, nevertheless, delighted when other students pay attention to their poems and their poems receive favorable feedback.

A poem such "Knoxville, Tennessee" may also be used to discuss and write about American culture, traditions, and food—and also to compare these dimensions with Swedish (or any other national) culture, traditions, and food. Likewise, the poem may be integrated into studies of these pillars of culture in order to add a more intimate perspective. The poem may, of course, be paired with similar poems, such as two childhood memory poems by Rita Dove, "Grape Sherbet" (1983) and "Crab Boil: (Ft. Myers, 1962)" (1989), which center on American holidays, Memorial Day and

Independence Day, respectively, or Maya Angelou's "And still I Rise" (1978) and "Phenomenal Woman" (1978) to discuss African American history, identity, and race. Similarly, the activism of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks may be used as an entry point to the poem. "Knoxville, Tennessee" may also be compared with June Jordan's "Poem about Police Violence" (1974) or Lee Daniels's film *Precious* (2009) to broach questions such as popular culture, current social issues, and activism in America. But "Knoxville, Tennessee" may also be considered in a larger, multicultural context. In combination with Seamus Heaney's "Clearances" (1987), for example, the class may discuss childhood, home, family relations, and/or social conditions in different parts of the world.[38] But these are just some examples of the possible classroom uses of Giovanni's poetry.

Conclusion

To sum up, I have suggested that introducing poetry in EFL classrooms does not need to be a challenging experience for either teachers or students. There are numerous accessible poems that can be used in English classes, Giovanni's poetry being a good example. Moreover, studying a poem is a good starting point for creative writing. In fact, the move from background biography information and a poet's first-person accounts to evoking the students' own experiences and having them write about their own lives can be gradual and relatively effortless.

Notes

1 David Ian Hanauer, "Meaningful Literacy: Writing Poetry in the Language Classroom," *Language Teaching: Surveys and Studies* 45, no. 1 (2011): 111–2, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444810000522. Hanauer focuses more exclusively on writing poetry as part of second-language writing instruction and claims that his methodology "overturns the core aims of most language classrooms, moving from a decontextualized focus on code, communication and cognition to a focus on personal experience and expression" (114). In a Swedish secondary education context, the common core aims can be observed if focus is placed on poetry writing along with the study of poems. On the common aims in Sweden, see Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], "English," *Skolverket*, accessed March 25, 2019, https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.4fc05a3f164131a74181056/1535372297288/EngEngl-swedish-school.pdf.

2 For a discussion of the benefits of using poetry in EFL teaching, see Carla Cariboni Killander, "Poetry in Second Language Teaching: Aspects of a Major Challenge," in *Proceedings of the ICERI2011 Conference*, ed. I. Candel Torres, L. Gómez Chova, and A. López Martínez (Valencia: International Association of Technology, Education and Development, 2011), 18; Reena Mittal, "Teaching English through Poetry: A Powerful Medium for Learning Second Language," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 5 (2014): 21–2; Ingmar Bloemendal, "English Language and Culture: Education and Communciation" (MA thesis, Utrecht University, 2014). See also Timothy V. Rasinski, Wil-

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8 Ibid., 7, 15.

9 Kim Haraldsson, "The Poetic Classroom: Teaching Poetry in English Language Courses in Swedish Upper Secondary Schools" (BA thesis, Halmstad University, 2011), 11.

10 Ibid., 13.

11 Bill Overton, "'People Have Forgotten How to Hear the Music': The Teaching of Poetry and Prosody," *English* 57, no. 219 (2008): 267, https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efn016.

12 Haraldsson, "The Poetic Classroom," 6, 12.

13 Bill Overton, "Teaching Eighteenth-Century English Poetry: An Experiment," *English* 40, no. 167 (1991): 137, https://doi.org/10.1093/english/40.167.137.

14 Hanauer, *Poetry and the Meaning of Life*, 7.

15 Haraldsson, "The Poetic Classroom," 16.

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17 Varun Jewalikar and Nishant Verma, "The Largest Vocabulary in Music: An Analysis of Vocabularies of Top Selling Musicians," *MusixMatch*, June 2015, http://lab.musixmatch.com/largest_vocabulary.

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20 Nikki Giovanni, *Knoxville, Tennessee*, ill. Larry Johnson, III (New York: Scholastic, 1994).

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23 Nikki Giovanni, "Knoxville, Tennesse," in *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968–1998* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 59.

24 Nikki Giovanni, *Gemini: An Extended Autobiographical Statement on My First Twenty-Five Years of Being a Black Poet* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), 12.

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28 Nikki Giovanni, "Nikki-Rosa," in *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968–1998* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 53.

29 Keith D. Leonard, "Love in the Black Arts Movement: The Other American Exceptionalism," *Callaloo* 36, no. 3 (2013): 621, https://doi.org/10.1353/cal.2013.0178. Leonard points to the efforts of African Americans "to sustain an affirming communal emotional life." He asserts that the poem is about togetherness which emerges from poverty but which is, at the same time, "not characterized at all by suffering." He further offers insights on the choice of this communality, noting a willingness to "embrace the togetherness over the trouble . . . not through naiveté but through an empowering sense that the togetherness is validating" (621).

30 Virginia C. Fowler, *Nikki Giovanni* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 7.

31 See Virginia C. Fowler, *Nikki Giovanni: A Literary Biography* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2013), 52.

32 "Nikki-Rosa," *Center for Civic Reflection*, accessed June 22, 2018, https://civicreflection.org/resources/library/browse/nikki-rosa.

33 Jago, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*, 11.

34 Ibid., 36–7.

35 Ibid., 15.

36 gaura, "Sensory Poems. Inspired by Nikki Giovanni's 'knoxville, tn,'" *SlideServe*, September 25, 2014, https://www.slideserve.com/gaura/sensory-poems.

37 Jago, *Nikki Giovanni in the Classroom*, 35.

38 As Hanauer explains, "Poetry . . . has particular value in promoting multiculturalism and the understanding of human diversity and can provide moments of contact among individuals living in diverse communities." David Ian Hanauer, "Multicultural Moments in Poetry: The Importance of the Unique," *The Canadian Modern Language Review/ La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* 60, no. 1 (2003): 71, https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.60.1.69.

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Life Writing and American Studies

Forum

edited by
Nassim W. Balestrini
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Abstract

This forum seeks to outline a variety of research prospects at the intersection of American studies and life writing studies. The common thread that interrelates the individual contributions is spun and twisted out of various filaments of life writing theory which productively dialogue with current trajectories in American studies. The contributors to this forum highlight what they consider particularly significant developments of the interdisciplinary field of life writing studies. Taken together, they raise issues about representations of the self in film, literature, and popular culture from the vantage points of transnational American studies, feminist studies, intermediality studies, oceanic studies, affect theory, critical race theory, and queer theory. The result is a rich, multi-layered conversation about the future of American studies within the interdisciplinary and decidedly transnational context of life writing studies.

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Life Writing and American Studies

Forum

Nassim W. Balestrini
and
Silvia Schultermandl

The field of life writing studies periodically entertains speculations about its future development.[1] In this context, many themes central to American studies concerns have received attention in the two leading journals of life writing studies in the past five years: *Biography* has published special issues on indigenous lives and online life writing,[2] while *a|b: Auto|Biography Studies* gave special attention to the Americas with two special issues in 2015 and 2016, respectively.[3] Interestingly, lesser curated efforts to address life writing concerns have appeared in flagship American studies journals, including *American Quarterly*, *American Literature*, and *American Literary History*. Contributing to these critical efforts, this forum identifies three research prospects which illustrate the productive intersections between American studies and life writing studies. In this light, the phenomena discussed in the contributions to this forum expand the field imaginary of American studies through the inclusion of transoceanic, digital, and intermedial life writing in the widest sense. The forum as a whole also attends to questions of genre and form and thereby raises issues about the relationship between aesthetics and politics in various cultural phenomena.

An expansion of the field imaginary of American studies demands constant redefinitions of life writing practices. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's attempt to map specific forms of life writing and the sixty life narrative genres they list in their classic handbook *Reading Autobiography* (2001) are particularly relevant in this context.[4] The intersections between basic long-standing terms, such as "Auto/biography, or a/b" and "Autofiction,"[5] convey the context-oriented variability of concepts which has inspired numerous neologisms for hitherto unrecognized or recently developed forms and foci. The inclusion of the "Diary," of "Letters," and of

"Digital life stories" indicates the gamut from life writing formats of yore to the age of new media,[6] which simultaneously suggests numerous scenarios of shifting conceptualizations of the private and the public. Smith and Watson's typology also distinguishes, among other things, between genres that either focus on individual selfhood or on context-centered self-definitions. In the latter category, "Relational life writing" depicts the autobiographer not as possessing an autonomous and stable self but rather as being a person with an interdependent and fluid sense of selfhood.[7] Interdependent selfhood may provide the basis for "collectivized and situated life writing in which the bios of autobiography is replaced by the ethnos or social group," to draw on Smith and Watson's description of autoethnography.[8] Taking up the tension between facticity and fictionality, such a social formation is an ideal rather than a reality, and a relational approach may serve to combat "cultural invisibility" through foregrounding membership in a "mythic community" that serves disadvantaged or marginalized social groups.[9] The frequently collaborative genesis of autoethnographic writing, which was to move away from "the investigator–informant model of ethnography as a practice that sustains asymmetrical relations of colonialism,"[10] nevertheless often comes in the form of "as-told-to" texts that threaten to muffle the voice of the person depicted.[11] Further subgenres use a location or a type of life-changing experience as a point of departure ("Prison narratives"; "Survivor narrative"; "Conversion narrative"; "Spiritual life narrative"), or they hinge upon the desired impact of writing or reading the account ("Scriptotherapy" and "Self-help narrative"). As this overview indicates, genre considerations in the realm of life writing studies go far beyond form, style, and content. Instead, they branch out into contextual issues like genesis, publication, distribution, and reading practices of life narratives.

As the five thematic sections will demonstrate, life writing studies converses effectively with many twenty-first-century American studies concerns. For instance, the movement away from life writing in conventional book format and toward multimedial or online forms of representation raises new questions about authorship, audience, medium, genre, and the shifting power relations between the autobiographical subject and the teller of the tale. The production, dissemination, and reception of autobiographical self-expression in liminal genres which waver between private and public consumption—such as diaries and letters—furthermore require contextual analyses of individual texts and a reconsideration of reading practices. From a transnational American studies context, this diversity of formats and contexts calls attention to the trans- and intercultural features based on practices defined by language, cultural expectations, and aesthetic concepts. In particular, our collaborative essay attends to American studies concerns such as citizenship and nationhood versus individuality, mobility versus rootedness, and

progressive historiography versus nostalgic attachment to tradition. The sequence of short essays is based on the following rationale: with reference to the recurring question regarding authenticity in life writing, the individual contributors move in their discussions from personal diaries and letters as historical life writing documents (Depkat) via first-person documentary films (Rieser), the co-presence of producers and consumers in quick media life writing (Schultermandl), intermedial and transnational representations of hip-hop artists (Balestrini) to unsettling practices of reading and of constituting an archive of transoceanic mobility and settler colonialism (Fackler).

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Notes

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3 Ricia Anne Chansky, ed., "Auto|Biography across the Americas," special issue, *a|b: Auto|Biography Studies* 30, no. 1 (2015); Laura J. Beard, ed. "Indigenous Autobiographical Writings in the Americas," special issue, *a|b: Auto|Biography Studies* 31, no. 3 (2016).

4 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 253–86.

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6 Ibid., 266, 273, 268.

7 Ibid., 278–9; see also Leigh Gilmore, "The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre," in *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley, Leigh Gilmore, and Gerald Peters (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 6; Anne Rüggemeier, *Die relationale Autobiographie: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie, Poetik und Gattungsgeschichte eines neuen Genres in der englischsprachigen Erzählliteratur* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2014).

8 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 258.

9 Ibid. 263.

10 Ibid., 258.

11 See Smith and Watson's entries on collaborative life writing (264), ethnic life narratives (269), and heterobiography (272).

Letters and Diaries as Life Writing

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The burgeoning field of life writing studies constitutes a meeting ground of historiography and literary criticism. Historians and literary critics approach one and the same phenomenon from different disciplinary perspectives and with different epistemological interests. For historians, the texts that literary critics call life writing are personal documents, *Selbstzeugnisse*, or ego-documents that help pave the way toward understanding the "subjective dimension" of history, i.e., the personalities, minds, motivations, emotions, and worldviews of concrete historical actors, who made, experienced, or endured history.[1]

In approaching life writing material in such a way, historians are interested in it as sources, which for them is all the material handed down to us from which they can draw knowledge of past realities. The great divide in the classification of sources in historiography runs between supposedly objective sources (files of government and private institutions, statistics, laws, treaties, newspapers, etc.)—*Akten* in German—and subjective or personal sources such as autobiographies, letters, and diaries.[2]

In treating life writing material as sources, historians try to reach through the text itself to something behind it, which, in this case, is the "self" of an historical actor. The effect of this analytical gaze, however, is that the "self" of a historical persona, their personality, and public image, become historical facts in and of themselves. Until recently, there was among historians only little awareness of the textuality of life writing material, of the narrative patterns, the genre conventions, and the strategies of emplotment that define how a past reality is and can be represented in these texts. In addition, the idea that the narrator of an autobiography or the writer of a diary or letter may not be identical with the historical actor, and that the writer of life writing pieces can actually play very different communicative roles in narrating their selves to an imagined audience, rarely crossed historians' minds.

Against this backdrop, I have suggested that historians can fully realize the potential of life writing material as historical sources only if they approach it as texts serving concrete and identifiable purposes in a given historical context.[3] This methodological premise invites historians to identify the narrative patterns of meaning-making in a life writing piece, to take into consideration the specific forms and conventions for the representation of reality and the self that a certain genre of life writing follows, and, most importantly, to understand life writing material not as a *mirror* of a solid "self" that is behind it—but rather to see the life writing text as a site of constructing, negotiating, defending, or reformulating subjectivity in view

of experienced historical change.

If one accepts the premise that life writing serves clearly identifiable personal, political, economic, or cultural purposes, and that it fulfills historically specific functions in a given biographic-historical context, then it is only consequential to analyze the textual and communicative pragmatics of a given life writing piece. Taking such an analytical path means to analyze the *what* and *how* of life writing in relation to the *when* and *why*, and it is the when and why of an autobiographical communication that bridges the gap from text to context. In some instances, the when and why of life writing can be traced from the material itself; in other instances, this contextual information has to be retrieved from other sources and materials.

Such an approach problematizes the meta-category of *life writing* because it threatens to conflate the narrative, communicative, and pragmatic specificities of life writing subgenres such as autobiography, diary, and letter. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's itemization of sixty life narrative genres suggests,[4] scholars should differentiate between the various genres of life writing and their mechanisms and patterns of representing the *self*. Furthermore, each of the life writing subgenres can come in multiple shapes, manners, and forms, and each can have multiple communicative functions.

Most importantly, however, historians, in their quest for the historical persona behind each instance of life writing, have tended to see one and the same self at work behind a diary, a letter, or an autobiography. What they can learn from literary criticism is the simple fact that writers of letters can imagine themselves to be somebody very different from how they fashion themselves as diary writers or narrators of autobiographies.

Against this backdrop, it is important to stress that letters as a form of life writing force the author to say "I" much more so than diaries or even autobiographies do. This "I" is an "epistolary I" that must not carelessly be equated with the historical person writing the letter. Furthermore, in contrast to autobiographies with a collective dimension, letters are a much more individualistic form of life writing.[5] At the same time, they are but traces of past communications between real people, situated in larger communicative contexts that transcend the materiality of the written letters by far. Letters are written to establish or to maintain personal contacts between real people. Hence, they do not just mirror existing social relations. Rather, social relationships are imagined, organized, and negotiated through them. This, however, means that the "epistolary I" always constructs their identity in relation to the letter's addressee.

As to traces of past communications between real people, letters can provide more than purely verbal texts because they can contain drawings, calligraphic ele-

ments, or other materials such as newspaper clippings and photos that go way beyond what is actually said and written in the letter itself. This very materiality of a letter defines part of its source value independent of its contents.

In contrast to letters and autobiographies, diaries are narrative instruments to observe oneself and one's times in an episodic and scenic form in close temporal proximity to the things written about.[6] Diary life writing is a rather fragmented form of self-reflection in short but regular entries over a longer period of time, frequently on a daily basis. Important structural elements of self-reflection in a diary are its chronological order, the relative brevity of the entries, and their seriality. Although diary life writing unfolds as a narration of the self in days, episodes, and scenes, diaries offer more than a random accumulation of individual episodes that do not form a coherent story. In contrast to autobiographers, diarists are under next to no pressure to narrate a coherent story about their respective individual self that is meaningful as a whole and in all of its parts. Yet although diaries do not present a master narrative about the self, the episodes of a diary are interrelated insofar as any one entry makes sense only in connection to preceding or following entries.[7]

Although the form of a diary suggests the communicative situation of a monologue, self-narrations in a diary actually unfold as a dialogue. This can be the dialogue of the diarist with him- or herself, with his or her diary, or with a real or imagined recipient, which in the case of religious diaries can be God. In any case, the communication of the self in diaries is based on the suggestion of privacy, intimacy, and even secrecy. Irrespective of whether diaries were intended for private use only, the *topoi* of privacy structure the shape, manner, and form of self-reflection in a diary.

The uses and purposes of diaries are just as varied and multiple as those of all other life writing subgenres. Some of the most prominent ones in the case of diaries are the documentation of one's everyday life, a chronology of events, a description of feelings and moods, as well as introspection and self-reflection. In some cases, diaries are written as potential sources for projected autobiographies or future historiographies.

Notes

1 Rudolf Dekker, ed., *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in Its Context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren,2002); Volker Depkat, "Ego-Dokumente als quellenkundliches Problem," in *Die Biographie in der Stadt- und Regionalgeschichte, ed. Marcus Stumpf* (Münster: LWL – Archivamt für Westfalen, 2011), 21–32; Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, "In Relation: The 'Social Self' and Ego-Documents," *German History* 28, no. 3 (2010): 263–72, https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghq065; Kaspar von Greyerz, "Ego-Documents: The Last Word?" *German History* 28, no. 3 (2010): 273–82, https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghq064; Benigna von Krusenstjern, "Was sind

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2 This classification of sources originates in the historicist tradition which remains in place to this very day. See Ernst Bernheim, *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 5th and 6th ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1908); Winfried Baumgart, ed., *Quellenkunde zur deutschen Geschichte der Neuzeit von 1500 bis zur Gegenwart* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), CD-ROM; Ahasver von Brandt and Franz Fuchs, *Werkzeug des Historikers: Eine Einführung in die historischen Hilfswissenschaften* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2012); G. Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian* (Munich: Heinemann Verlag, 1967). For a critique, see Volker Depkat, "Plädoyer für eine kommunikationspragmatische Erneuerung der Quellenkunde," in *Geschichte, Öffentlichkeit, Kommunikation: Festschrift für Bernd Sösemann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Patrick Merziger et al. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 205–21.

3 For the most recent synopsis, see Volker Depkat, "Doing Identity: Auto/Biographien als Akte sozialer Kommunikation," in *Imperial Subjects: Autobiographische Praxis in den Vielvölkerreichen der Romanovs, Habsburger und Osmanen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Martin Aust and Frithjof Benjamin Schenk (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2015), 39–58; Volker Depkat, "Autobiographie als geschichtswissenschaftliches Problem," in *Autobiographie zwischen Text und Quelle*, ed. Volker Depkat and Wolfram Pyta (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2017), 23–40. On autobiography, see Jeremy D. Popkin, *History, Historians and Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

4 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 253–86.

5 Robert Vellusig, *Schriftliche Gespräche: Briefkultur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2000); Jörg Schuster and Jochen Strobel, eds., *Briefkultur: Texte und Interpretationen – von Martin Luther bis Thomas Bernhard* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013). I also base my remarks on the results of the conference "Briefe zwischen Text und Quelle" that I co-organized with Wolfram Pyta at the Deutsche Literaturarchiv Marbach (March 29–31, 2017). The conference volume is forthcoming.

6 Arno Dusini, *Tagebuch: Möglichkeiten einer Gattung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005); Sabine Gruber, *Das Tagebuch: Ein Medium der Selbstreflexion* (Mainz: Dr.-Ing.-Hans-Joachim-Lenz-Stiftung, 2008). I also base my remarks on the results of the conference "Tagebuch zwischen Text und Quelle" that I co-organized with Wolfram Pyta at the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies Regensburg (November 21–22, 2014). The conference volume is forthcoming.

7 Dusini, *Tagebuch*, 102–4.

First-Person Documentary Film and Self-Life Narration

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My contribution to this forum on life writing contemplates life narrative practices in documentary film and proposes two theses that also bear relevance for other fields and media under discussion here. Firstly, it problematizes the concepts of autobiography and life writing for their applicability to (documentary) film, arguing with Alisa Lebow for a notion of "first person film."[1] Secondly, it contends that representations of the self in documentary film are more appropriately comprehended as a discourse rather than a genre.

In film, autobiography and biography are overlapping phenomena and, thus, hard to disentangle. For example, many documentaries which deliver an elaborate portrait of a filmmaker's self are actually studies of other persons, such as members of their family. This is the case in one of the most complex recent documentaries with an autobiographical aspect: Sarah Polley's *Stories We Tell* (2012).[2] Based on interviews with siblings, friends, and relatives of her parents and (partly *faux*) home video footage, this film retraces her parents' relationship and her own discovery that she is the offspring of her mother's extramarital affair. In addition to being a family memoir, the film is also a clever contemplation of questions of truth, authenticity, memory, and identity. The film is not alone, however, in its circuitous rendering of subjectivity through a portrait of someone else "who informs the filmmaker's sense of him- or herself."[3] One may think, for example, of Michael Moore's oeuvre as an extended memoir, starting with *Roger and Me* (1989) and extending through most of his essayistic (rather than strictly autobiographical) films. In other words, such films are—at least partly—autobiographies in content but not in form.

Consequently, Lebow prefers the phrase "first person film" to "autobiographical film" because the films she analyzes speak from a particular, subjective position rather than being "about oneself": "[F]irst person film is not primarily, and certainly not always explicitly, autobiographical."[4] She adds that "first person film" encompasses both the singular and the plural, both a "cinema of me" and "cinema of we," as these films overcome the subject/object dichotomy characteristic of traditional documentary film by constructing a dialogue between subjects.[5] Thus, such films are characterized by "relationality," which Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson identify as one of three "enabling concepts" in life writing, the other two being "performativity" and "positionality."[6] Moreover, this style of self-representation through a representation of close others, which Jim Lane labels "autobiographical portraiture,"[7] counters the reification of the individual subject, instead serving to "rupture the illusion of authenticity."[8] This is precisely the case with *Stories We Tell* when the audience

realizes that many of the seemingly authentic home video sequences in the film are actually scripted and acted.

This view of "autobiographical" films also corresponds with a concept of performativity prevalent in discourses about documentary film (as well as in life writing studies). For Bill Nichols, "performative" is one among six types of documentary film, characterized by being performed for the camera, and distinguished from expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and poetic modes.[9] In contrast, Stella Bruzzi asserts that "the performative documentary uses performance within a non-fiction context to draw attention to the impossibilities of authentic documentary representation."[10] In this way, she wishes to expand the notion of performativity for documentary film, stressing "that documentaries are a negotiation between the filmmaker and reality, and, at heart, a performance."[11] This assessment of contemporary documentary film in general is, in my view, particularly true for "first person film" because it is so frequently characterized by a performance of relationships. It also coincides with Smith and Watson's assessment that "self-life narration" (their term for autobiography) is defined more by what it *does* than by what it *is*.[12]

Performative and self-reflexive auto/biographical documentaries such as *Stories We Tell* also fit well into what John Corner identifies as "postdocumentary."[13] On the one hand, critics such as Corner lament that by the 2000s, defining features of the classical documentary, such as a relation to democratic civics, a journalistic ethos, radical interrogation, and alternative positions, have given way to formats such as Reality TV—that is, to formats that are mostly characterized by diversion. On the other hand, the term "postdocumentary" (as in other cases of the use of "post") does not refer to a time after documentary, but rather to an opening up of possibilities: next to the classical documentary, the genre is now characterized by proliferating styles, revivals (of the classical monumental biopic, for example), and self-reflexive forms. Thus, we now encounter not only new forms of documentary "film" (from television docusoaps to action camera films) in diverse media (from the cinematic to online videos) which refer to a multiplicity of "realities" (from make-up tutorials to social commentary), but also an increase of autodocumentaries. In fact, auto/biographical documentary films have been booming in the twenty-first century, in digital media, social networks, video channels—and in cinemas. This is particularly striking because, before the 1980s, self-representation occurred much more rarely through the mode of documentary film. Since classical documentaries strove for "objectivity," a first-person address was generally relegated to marginalized formats such as avant-garde film (e.g. visionary film or diary film) and home movies. Since then, however, the personal and the political have been more commonly merged—still marginalized but forming a substantial body of works which engage the intersection of the autobiographical self, the questions of mediation,

and the relation to others. As Jim Lane states, "The autobiographical documentary sets in motion a paradoxical representational scheme in which the self and historical events are referenced at the same time that they are 'mediated.'"[14]

How can we, then, best capture the changing forms and salient features of contemporary auto/biographical documentary film alluded to in this cursory overview? For this purpose, it may be helpful to shift the analytical focus from genre and media to discourse (in a Foucauldian sense) since, as we have seen, first-person film is not easily contained within neither a particular genre nor a particular medium. Furthermore, the changes which auto/biographical film has undergone since the 1980s may also be best understood as aspects of a larger social transformation, a paradigm shift between different discursive formations. It seems quite plausible that the transformation of the documentary, and in particular of the first-person documentary, coincides with an epistemic shift from a discourse of truth-telling to a discourse of self-revelation and self-invention with a corresponding new understanding of the subject of these films: rather than assuming a stable, self-contained individuality, these films offer examinations of subjectivities as transient, related, and narrative constructions.

Notes

1 Alisa Lebow, *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary* (London: Wallflower Press, 2012).

2 *Stories We Tell*, dir. Sarah Polley (Toronto, ON: Mongrel Media, 2012).

3 Lebow, *Cinema of Me*, 1.

4 Ibid., 2. This approach is related to Bill Nichols's claim that the defining aspect of documentary film is that of a particular "voice" composed of voice-over, dialogue, and technical choices (such as pans, zooms, etc.). In other words, for Nichols, the individual "voice" of the filmmaker is primary while the channelling of this voice through genre (autobiography, biography, etc.) is secondary. Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomingdale: Indiana University Press, 2010).

5 Lebow, *Cinema of Me*, 3.

6 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life-Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 214–6.

7 Jim Lane, *The Autobiographical Documentary in America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 94–143.

8 Lebow, *Cinema of Me*, 5.

9 Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*.

10 Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (2000; London: Routledge, 2006), 185.

11 Ibid., 186. In a related move, Robert A. Rosenstone praised experimental historical film as early as 1995: "History as experiment does not make the same claim on us as does

the realist film. Rather than opening a window directly onto the past, it opens a window onto a different way of thinking about the past." Robert A. Rosenstone, "The Historical Film as Real History," *Film-Historia* 5, no. 1 (1995), http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/film-historia/article/view/12244/14998.

12 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 19.

13 John Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," *Television and New Media* 3, no. 3 (2002): 257, https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476402003003002.

14 Lane, *Autobiographical Documentary*, 192.

Online Life Writing

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The advent of Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006, Tumblr in 2007, Instagram and Pinterest in 2010, and Snapchat and Google+ in 2011 facilitated the emergence of "everyday" autobiographies out of keeping with memoir practices of the past.[1] These "quick media" enable constant, instantaneous, and seemingly organic expressions of everyday lives.[2] To read quick media as "autobiographical acts" allows us to analyze how people mobilize online media as representations of their lives and the lives of others.[3] They do so through a wide range of topics including YouTube testimonials posted by asylum seekers and the life-style-oriented content on Pinterest.[4] To be sure, the political content of these different quick-media life writing forms varies greatly. Nevertheless, in line with the feminist credo that the personal is political, these expressions of selfhood are indicative of specific societal and political contexts and thus contribute to the memoir boom long noticed on the literary market.[5]

Through this collapse of the boundaries between offline and online lives it becomes clear that quick media are sources of empowerment and vulnerability at the same time: notions of a democratic (easily accessible and affordable) usage coalesce with issues of user security and big data mining, on the one hand, and new social division along the infamous "digital divide" between internet-savvy users and those who lack the resources to participate in this form of online communication culture,[6] on the other. And while in media studies the skepticism toward the quality of cyber-relationships produces interesting observations about the social use of social media,[7] the field of life writing studies has witnessed a proliferation of new terminology which addresses the multi-medial and multi-modal shape given to online lives. For instance, the concept of "autobiographics" describes the practice of uploading visual content; similarly, the concept of "auto assemblages" references the layers of text generally featured on quick media that replace understanding of the verbal mediation of life narratives.[8] Likewise, practices such as "auto/curating" point toward a form of autobiographical self-expression composed primarily

of images.[9] These new concepts acknowledge the performative aspect of identity through quick media.

Quick media also have particular salience with regard to questions of kinship and community in a networked world.[10] Phenomena ranging from representations of non-traditional family models and the meeting of ersatz families in thematically clustered online platforms to the use of quick media for transnational families to connect over long distances and extended periods of absence throw into relief the concomitance of technological innovation and the emergence of new concepts and practices of kinship formation: trending hashtags such as #MeToo and #SignedBy-Trump have successfully addressed systemic sexism and created spaces for agency, community building, and empowerment. Similarly, quick media push the definitions of kinship and family toward inclusive family models, gender-fluid parenting, queer kinship, and transnational kinship.

While the concern with kinship and community constitutes one particular area in which the study of quick media has generated new insights, the relational nature of online life writing branches more broadly into research areas ranging from narratology to postmodern identity theories. For instance, the concept of the self-in-relation bespeaks networked interactivity, which relies on a "many-to-many structure, with a range of participants being private in public,"[11] and it refers to ongoing debates about the prevalence of the self in online media and the relational aspect of identity in the context of family and kinship.

The notion of accessing other people's "selves" through their online writing also raises questions about the constituency of the self in the networked constellation with other "authors" and "readers" who are active on quick media.[12] This entails reconsidering the stability of the narrating "I" and its accountability to what Philippe Lejeune termed the "autobiographical pact,"[13] especially since the advent of quick media brought about new forms of online expressions of the self which are, paradoxically, not so much about the self than about the constellations which shape subjectivities. While the content is self-selected and designed to represent individual identities, the networked nature of quick media highlights the collective context rather than the singular position of the individual. Further along these lines are analyses of the strategies of affective interpellation that are particular to online life writing's interactive and intermedial nature.[14]

While the immanence and spontaneity afforded by quick media technologies invites assumptions about online life writing as "authentic" expression, critics have tended to emphasize the composite nature of online texts. The interaction between multiple co-authors and co-creators of a life narrative—through such acts as tagging, reposting, and liking—participates equally in the production of the text as its

author of the text. At the same time, a certain degree of authenticity resides in the rhizomatic and multi-layered representation of the dialogic, subjective, and convoluted selves performed in online spaces.[15] They are cultural artifacts of networked lives that capture the communicative practices of the contemporary era.

Notes

1 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Getting a Life: Everyday Use of Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

2 May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl, "Introduction," in *Click and Kin: Transnational Identity and Quick Media*, ed. May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 9.

3 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Images, Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 4.

4 Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Laurie McNeill, "Digital Dioramas: Curating Life Narratives on the World Wide Web" (paper presented at the 2013 MLA Conference, Boston, MA, January 5, 2013).

5 Julie Rak, *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).

6 Gillian Youngs, "Cyberspace: The New Feminist Frontier?" in *Women and Media: International Perspectives*, ed. Karen Ross and Carolyn M. Byerly (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 185–209.

7 Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

8 Gillian Whitlock and Anna Poletti, "Self-Regarding Art," in "Autographics," ed. Gillian Whitlock and Anna Poletti, special issue, *Biography* 31, no. 1 (2008): xv, xx, https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.0.0004.

9 McNeill, "Digital Dioramas."

10 May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl, eds., "Autobiography 2.0 and Quick Media Life Writing," special issue, *Interactions: Studies in Culture and Communications* 9, no. 2 (2018).

11 Laurie McNeill and John David Zuern, "Online Lives 2.0: Introduction," in "Online Lives 2.0," ed. Laurie McNeill and John David Zuern, special issue, *Biography* 38, no. 2 (2015): xi, https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2015.0012.

12 Jason Breiter, Orly Lael Netzer, Julie Rak, and Lucinda Rasmussen, eds., "Auto/Biography in Transit," special issue, *Biography* 38, no. 1 (2015); Gillian Whitlock, "Post-ing Lives," in "(Post)Human Lives," ed. Gillian Whitlock, special issue, *Biography* 35, no. 1 (2012): v–xvi, https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2012.0000.

13 Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3.

14 Anna Poletti, "Reading for Excess: Relational Autobiography, Affect and Popular Culture in Tarnation," *Life Writing* 9, no. 2 (2012): 157–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2012

.667363; Silvia Schultermandl, "Auto-Assembling the Self on Social Networking Sites: Intermediality and Transnational Kinship in Online Academic Life Writing," in *Intermediality, Life Writing, and American Studies*, ed. Nassim W. Balestrini and Ina Bergmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 191–210.

15 Friedman and Schultermandl, eds., "Autobiography 2.0."

Intermedial and Transnational Hip-Hop Life Writing

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The growing popularity of celebrity life writing and of memoirs which focus on the respective memoirist's specific social, professional, ethnic, or other context has also spawned a large number of autobiographical publications by persons in the music industry. The field of musical autobiography is a recent development for which a niche in life writing scholarship has only been carved out in the past decade. The growing number of autobiographical book publications as well as autobiographical self-representations in non-analog, non-printed, not primarily verbal formats raises the question as to whether specific genres of hip-hop life writing have been evolving and as to the perspectives from which scholars should discuss them.

Situating musicians' life writing in general and hip-hop life writing in particular within the larger field of life writing studies poses multiple challenges. The asymmetrical power relation between a celebrity artist and her/his writer or editor in co-authored autobiographies, for example, sits uneasily with representing the artist/star through the lens of Enlightenment-style autobiographical discourse. Such discourse implies a narrative not only of social and economic upward mobility but also of a concomitant accumulation of knowledge and insight that the reader should emulate. Nevertheless, the Enlightenment autobiographical model is often used as a means of providing "high cultural legitimacy,"[1] particularly for artists in popular music genres.[2] A prominent example of a hip-hop artist's memoir that takes up this challenge of not following a traditional formula is Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson's *Mo' Meta Blues* (2013),[3] which includes multiple jabs at the traditional supremacy of the co-writer or editor and at the expectations regarding the stable-self narrative established by Enlightenment autobiography.[4] As I discuss elsewhere, Questlove upends the often racially informed imbalance between autobiographical subject and representatives of mainstream publication contexts through a polyvocal narrative that privileges his life narration and his (written) exchanges with Richard Nichols, the former manager of Questlove's group The Roots, on the one hand, and that gradually and humorously diminishes the role of his editor and a representative of his publisher whose email exchanges are interspersed into the main narrative. Eventually, the editor and the publisher's representative admit that Questlove

effectively derailed traditional autobiographical formats and created his own version of life narrative based on his development as a musician and on his worldview.[5] As a result, he challenges reading practices that expect autobiographical narratives to be monovocal and unidirectional.

Questlove's memoir, which relies on verbal narrative, assumes an intermedial strategy through visually perceivable differences of typesetting in order to indicate the interplay of voices (Illustration 1). He thus employs and interlaces verbal and visual means of processing his text. Other bestselling hip-hop autobiographies go far beyond typographical visual semantics and develop complex intermedial discourses in which the call-and-response between word and image creates a relational intermedial grammar. In the case of artists like Eminem and Jay Z, large-format book publications with myriad images, with text superimposed on images, and with numerous intermedial references to music call for analytical methods that acknowledge medium-specific affordances of meaning construction as well as the historical embeddedness of verbal life writing narratives and of the visual elements that share the semantic fields evoked in these texts. Such intermedial life writing not only transfers some of the components of hip hop into a book publication, but it also serves to elevate hip hop as an art form. Hip hop thus constitutes part of the subject matter because hip-hop artists' memoirs usually contain their philosophical approach to hip hop as a socially oriented art form; at the same time, hip hop offers new forms of self-expression that transcend hitherto prevailing autobiographical models.

For instance, Jay Z's *Decoded* (2010) features his rap lyrics accompanied by annotations regarding stylistic devices, literary, musical, and historical allusions, and autobiographical and political comments (Illustration 2).[6] All of this is visually reminiscent of a scholarly edition of a poem or other work of art that is taken seriously as a long-standing artifact rather than an ephemeral performance. The emphasis on the creative process counteracts clichéd notions of popular music and of non-white self-expression as spontaneous, shallow, and not worthy of analysis.[7] Similarly, Eminem's *The Way I Am* (2008) includes facsimiles of the lyricist's notebook pages, complete with captions that explain the contexts and thought processes of his creative work (Illustration 3).[8] The same innovative and respectability-oriented impetus characterizes hip-hop memoirs, for instance by M. F. Grimm (Percy Carey) and 50 Cent,[9] that opt for what Gillian Whitlock terms "autographics"[10]—that is, life writing in the form of graphic narratives.[11] As indicated, hip hop as subject matter and artistic form has been confronted with long traditions of prejudice. Autobiographical self-expression thus frequently takes up prejudicial perspectives and counteracts them by not simply adopting but rather adapting and revolutionizing life writing formats which used to be the prerogative of economically secure white men.

We added up all these factors and came up with a battle plan for *Phrenology*, which was that we were going to make the world's first anti-Roots Roots album. "We'll make every type of song that the Roots aren't supposed to do," someone said, and that became our template.[21]

When we started to collect material for the album, some of it came from unfinished tracks from Tariq's solo album, and for the rest, we relied on these extended jam sessions. Before we knew it we had a collection of songs that were as diverse and surprising as anything we had ever done. We had a cheesy R&B jam ("Break You Off"), a sexy strip song ("Pussy Galore"), a hardcore song ("!!!"), a twelve-minute antidrug screed ("Water"). We wanted to take the attention and goodwill we had generated with *Things Fall Apart* and present a catalog album of everything we were able to do. We wanted to shatter people's myths, not only about what rap groups could do, but also about what black groups could do. And we wanted to show everyone that our main reason for being was to change. *Do You Want More?!!!!!!* was acid jazz, *Illadelph Halflife* was a kind of Wu-Tang-influenced hard hip-hop production, and *Things Fall Apart* was definitive neo soul. We were going into the cocoon again. I wasn't worried about our audience. They would follow us or they wouldn't—I was used to losing about half our audience each time and picking up new fans—but I was determined to extend our artistic winning streak.

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21. Let's face it—*Phrenology* (by design, and mostly out of necessity) was a mishmash. It was a reification of your state-of-the-minute (post D-tour) musical leanings grafted onto Tariq's recalcitrant line in the sand *Masterpiece Theatre* (which, may I remind you, was itself a project he started because you went Michael Eugene Archering yellow-brick-road-style). It was a messy, circling-the-drain type of affair that ultimately revealed its own pretzel logic. But I guess good shit come to those who "weight," or maybe Cracker Jack–like prizes can be found after things fall apart.

Illustration 1: Questlove's *Mo' Meta Blues* employs intermedial strategies to highlight the interplay of numerous voices.

Illustration from Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson and Ben Greenman, *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2015), 194. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

MOST KINGS

Inspired by Basquiat, my chariots of fire / Everybody took shots hit my body up I'm tired / Build me up, break me down, to build me up again / They like Hov we need you back so we can kill your ass again / Hov got flow though he's no Big and Pac but he's close / **How I'm supposed to win they got me fighting ghosts . . .**[1] / **Same sword they knight you they gonna good night you with**[2] / shit that's only half if they like you / That ain't he even the half what they might do / **Don't believe me ask Michael**[3] / See Martin, see Malcolm / You see Biggie, see Pac, see success and its outcome / See Jesus, see Judas / **See Caesar, see Brutus**[4] / See success is like suicide / **Suicide, it's a suicide**[5] / If you succeed prepare to be crucified / Hmm, media meddles, niggas sue you, you settle / Every step you take they remind you, you ghetto / So it's tough being Bobby Brown / **To be Bobby then, you gotta be Bobby now**[6] / **Now the question is, is to have had and lost / Better than not having at all**[7] / **Everybody want to be the**

1. This is no shot at Big or Pac. The truth is that you can't compare us; Big only did two albums before he was killed, and Pac was still going through metamorphosis; who knows where he would've ended up. So when people make the comparison—as they always do—they're comparing my work not just with the work of Big and Pac, but with what they could've been—should've been—and what their lives and deaths represented to the entire culture. Their shadows still loom over all of us who were their peers.

2. I wanted to conjure an image here: someone kneeling, first to accept the honor of being knighted, and then being beheaded with the same sword, the posture of honor transformed to one of execution.

3. I wrote this before MJ died, and his death only proves my point: When he was alive, the King of Pop, people were tireless in taking him down, accepting as truth every accusation made against him, assuming the worst until they drove him away. When he died, suddenly he was beloved again—people realized that the charges against him might really have been bogus, and that the skin lightening was really caused by a disease, and that his weirdness was part of his artistry. But when he was alive and on top, they couldn't wait to bring him down. (In my opinion sharing sleeping quarters with other people's kids is inappropriate, to keep it real.)

4. Jesus and Caesar were both killed by people close to them, traitors.

5. A reference to KRS-One and Just-Ice's eighties classic "Moshitup." *Buddy bye-bye!*

6. Bobby then was a young star when he was known for his hit record "Every Little Step"; Bobby now is better known for the hit reality series, *Being Bobby Brown*, a cautionary tale about how it can all slip away.

7. Shout-out to Alfred, Lord Tennyson: "'Tis better to have loved and lost, than to never have loved at all."

Illustration 2: *Decoded* emphasizes the creative process involved in the production of popular music.
Illustration from Jay-Z, *Decoded*, exp. ed. (New York: Virgin Books/Spiegel and Grau/Random House, 2011), 98–9. Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

As hip hop is a globally practiced artistic form, transnational American studies offers further options for studying hip-hop life writing. Hip-hop artists' life writing predominately combines autobiographical narratives of personal growth through overcoming terrific obstacles and of emerging as a promoter of social justice with an explanation and defense of hip-hop culture and artistic production. In the US-American context, such success stories often take a detour through phases of poverty, racial discrimination, criminal activity, drug abuse, and the like. In addition to finding one's artistic self and defining one's positionality,[12] life writers find their way into a belief system in which to anchor their social activism.

In France, which constitutes the second-largest hip-hop market in the world, Abd Al Malik, a rapper of Congolese descent, published a memoir that was subsequently adapted for the screen and translated into English.[13] This matrix of hip-hop practice and reception provides a good example of where transnational American studies concerns can come to fruition. Al Malik's narrative focuses on his experience of individuation through religious belief and through education. Sufism, a mystic movement within Islam, inspires him to work for reconciliation among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and for human rights in general, while the narrative also expresses his

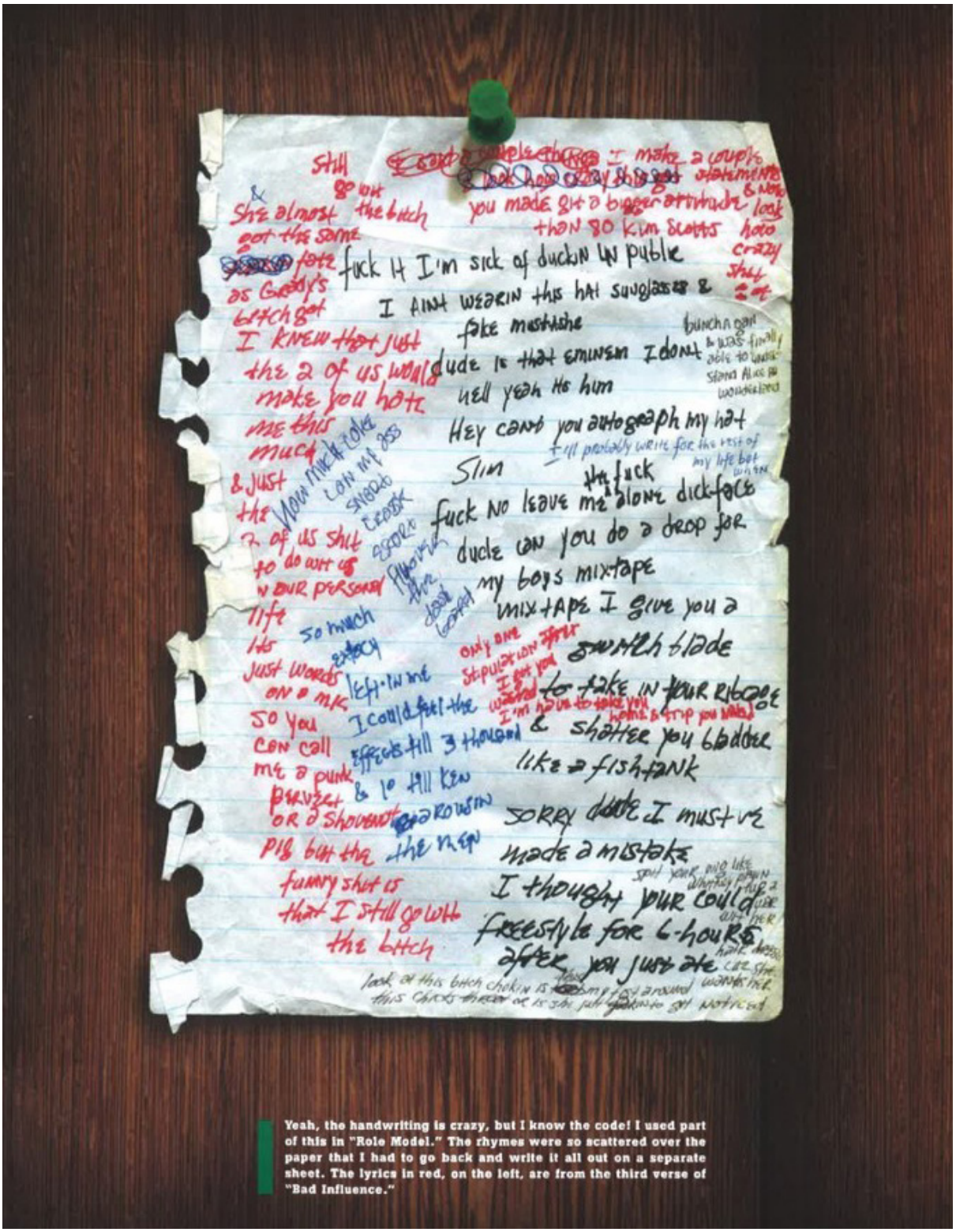

Illustration 3: *The Way I Am* explains the contexts and thought processes of Eminem's creative work.

Illustration from Eminem, with Sacha Jenkins, designed by Headcase Design, *The Way I Am* (New York: Dutton/Penguin Books, 2008). Image used in accordance with Austrian copyright law pertaining to the use of images for critical commentary.

love for France as a country and a culture.

Because of his appreciation of a national culture that has a troubled relationship with immigrants, Abd Al Malik's life narrative raises the issue as to whether his autobiography primarily functions as an emblem of mainstream respectability or rather as a site of revolutionizing white supremacist Eurocentric discourses in a transnational context. Having been decorated with the distinction of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French minister for cultural affairs in 2008, Al Malik's public image of the "good rapper" who stabilizes the republic has been criticized as cooptation. In the United States, a parallel phenomenon exists in the context of using hip-hop artists, particularly rappers who identify as Muslims, for State Department-sponsored cultural diplomacy in Muslim nations although Muslims are not generally seen as well-integrated into society, be it in the United States or in France. This form of soft diplomacy goes back to the equally problematic Cold War policy of sending African American jazz musicians to Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries.

Within autobiographical traditions, however, Abd Al Malik's arguments that Sufism is the heart of Islam that transcends hatred and Othering, that it allows him to be a musician, and that it has had a liberating effect echoes some of Malcolm X's experiences with international Islam as a global community devoid of racism. Simultaneously, Al Malik depicts his allegiance to France in terms of a specific understanding of what the republic stands for: the country he loves is not homogeneous but it is a republic that embraces the full range of religious and other belief systems.[14] He thus suggests that the laicism of the French political system is not to be seen as anti-religious or as exclusively Western in the Judeo-Christian sense, but that it implies the freedom to develop individual notions of selfhood. In contrast to those who rebuke Al Malik as having sold out to French assimilationist policies, his autobiography can be read as an appeal to renew allegiance to the original ideals of the French republic—a strategy that resonates with African American life writing traditions.

A transnational approach to hip-hop life writing allows for comparative research on potentially reciprocal flows of influence. Both in France and in the United States, hip-hop autobiographers face the same dilemmas: their complex understanding of national political ideology and of individual beliefs may be represented in a reductive fashion as a result of the clichéd and financially profitable ways in which they—as popular music celebrities—are portrayed by mass-market media. Their critics may not appreciate their programmatic statements regarding systemic problems in their countries and on a global level when it comes to discrimination on the basis of religion, race, and class. As soon as a rapper becomes a celebrity, particularly through receiving decorations and prizes, the artist struggles with accusations of cooptation, lack of subversion and authenticity, and adherence to neoliberal positions.

Further work needs to be done on how particular rappers who identify as Muslims present themselves as both dedicated religious believers and dedicated members of a nation, even though post-9/11 rhetoric frequently implies that this particular combination is a contradiction in terms. Their predicament is thus emblematic for hip-hop life writing and musicians' life writing in a wider sense, as the current cultural valences of an artist's genre and performance contexts tend to impact what kinds of life writing may be regarded as marketable to a specific readership.

Notes

1 Daniel Stein and Martin Butler, "Musical Autobiographies: An Introduction," in "Musical Autobiographies," ed. Daniel Stein and Martin Butler, special issue, *Popular Music and Society* 38, no. 2 (2015): 116–7, https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2014.994324.

2 For a discussion of the economic implications of celebrity life writing, see Julie Rak, *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 6–7, 12, 16.

3 Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson and Ben Greenman, *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove* (2013; New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2015).

4 Stein and Butler, "Musical Autobiographies," 115.

5 Nassim Winnie Balestrini, "Hip Hop Life Writing: An Intermedial Challenge to Essentialist Reading Practices," in *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music Studies*, ed. Justin Burton and Jason Lee Oakes (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

6 Jay-Z, *Decoded*, expanded ed. (2010; New York: Virgin Books/Spiegel and Grau/Random House, 2011).

7 Regarding the stereotype of non-white artistic self-expression as "untrained," "natural," "mimetic," and thus not really valuable, see Stuart Hall, "What Is 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice* 20, nos. 1–2 (1993): 104–14, repr. in *Popular Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Michael Pickering (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 443; Berndt Ostendorf, "Celebration or Pathology? Commodity or Art? The Dilemma of African-American Expressive Culture," *Black Music Research Journal* 20, no. 2 (2000): 217–36, https://doi.org/10.2307/779468, repr. in *Popular Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Michael Pickering (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 385–402.

8 Eminem, with Sacha Jenkins, designed by Headcase Design, *The Way I Am* (New York: Dutton/Penguin Books, 2008). For a more extensive discussion, see Nassim Winnie Balestrini, "Strategic Visuals in Hip-Hop Life Writing," in "Musical Autobiographies," ed. Daniel Stein and Martin Butler, special issue, *Popular Music and Society* 38, no. 2 (2015): 224–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2014.994318; Nassim Winnie Balestrini, "Hip-Hop Life Writing and African American Urban Ecology," in *America after Nature*, ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Juliane Braun (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 287–307.

9 Percy Carey, writer, Ronald Wimberly, artist, Lee Loughridge, gray tones, and Jared K. Fletcher, letters, *Sentences: The Life of M. F. Grimm* (New York: DC Comics, 2007); 50 Cent and Robert Greene, writers, and Dave Crossland, illustrator, *The 50th Law* (San Jose, CA: SmarterComics, 2012).

10 Gillian Whitlock, "Autographics: The Seeing 'I' of the Comics," in "Graphic Narrative," ed. Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven, special issue, *Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 (2006): 965–79.

11 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 260; Balestrini, "Hip Hop Life Writing: An Intermedial Challenge."

12 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 215.

13 Abd Al Malik, *Sufi Rapper: The Spiritual Journey of Abd Al Malik*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2009).

14 Jeanette S. Jouili, "Rapping the Republic: Utopia, Critique, and Muslim Role Models in Secular France," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 31, no. 2 (2013): 64.

Postcolonial and Transoceanic Life Writing

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The study of life writing and postcolonial theory have had a long, intimate, and mutually constitutive relationship. The desire to more comprehensively understand the (human) subjectivities of the (formerly) colonized through (their own) cultural expression has driven life writing scholars to significantly expand their canon and their scholarly methods. The human and the non-human are onto-social conditions imposed on colonized and enslaved peoples. In the context of transoceanic studies, various conditions of unfreedom can be found which call attention to the prevalence of lives deemed non-human within the parameters of European Enlightenment. Substantial advances notwithstanding, the field is still grappling with what Lisa Lowe describes as the "economy of affirmation and forgetting that structures and formalizes the archives of liberalism."[1] This short piece contends that recently emerging (trans-)oceanic approaches hold great potential for taking the study of life writing an important step further on its way beyond the liberal economy of affirmation and forgetting.

For postcolonial theorists, the type of liberal Enlightenment thinking, writing, and feeling that dominated early autobiography studies was not—or not only—emancipatory but "commensurate with, and deeply implicated in, colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and empire."[2] They claim that Western modernity can only be understood if the presumably rational, sovereign, and authentic subject of autobiography (usually Western, gendered as masculine, and racialized as white) is connected with "the less exalted or collective subject of life narrative."[3] For this purpose, the field of life writing studies has expanded its object of study to include all "writing that takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject."[4] Owing to the work of these scholars, cultural expressions such as slave narratives have now been part of the canon for decades.

With their help, notions of the self and of life writing have been jointly rearticulated.

Nevertheless, major challenges persist. As more recent scholarship has shown, writings by the colonized are often themselves imbricated in colonialist ways of thinking and feeling. Moreover, if life writing aims at (ego) documents that allow conclusions regarding the minds and motivations of historical actors, what about those subjects who never enjoyed historical agency within a Western(ized) public sphere? What about interdependence-oriented subjectivities, such as many members of indigenous cultures, that never had a sense of a solitary "ego" for which certain forms of life writing seemed an adequate form of cultural expression? In other words, the question still is: how can we avoid seeing life worlds merely through the eyes of those who have been privileged by what Walter Mignolo, referencing Aníbal Quijano, calls the "colonial matrix of power"?[5]

Many recent impulses on how precisely humans and their life narratives can be understood more comprehensively come from spaces formerly considered marginal to cosmopolitan knowledge production, such as "the ex-slave archipelago."[6] Jamaican writer and cultural theorist Sylvia Wynter's work, for example, powerfully challenges critics to move beyond a "monohumanist" conception that constitutes the bourgeois, complete, Western Man as the human and that denies full humanity to others. As a substitute for the Western biocentric model, she proposes an understanding of humans as "hybrid being[s]" who are defined by the biological ("bios") and by their narratives ("mythoi") at the same time.[7] Consequently, humanness is no longer understood as a (stable, centered) noun, but as a "praxis" that enables different "genres of being human."[8] Wynter makes a persuasive case for "the central role that our discursive *formations*, aesthetic fields, and systems of knowledge must play in the performative enactment of all such genres of being hybridly human."[9] Transferred to literary studies, Wynter's theory demands a radical expansion of our understanding of life narratives and their subjects.

Given the centrality of ocean-crossings not only for the Black but also for the Native American and the Asian American experience, it may hardly surprise that many responses to such challenges are inspired by transoceanic human im/mobilities. Such perspectives, I argue, have a particular potential for un-settling the epistemologies of (settler) colonialism. Recent work on oceanic writing is interested in all kinds of marine experiences, not only those of explorers and voluntary migrants but also those of the enslaved, the indentured, and the conscripted in both the Atlantic and the Pacific worlds. This includes the countless individuals who never made it across the ocean or never lived to see emancipation, to learn how to read and write, or to attain a voice in a culture that deprived them of their humanity. The histories of these ocean-crossings, which often played out on ships, islands, or archipelagoes,

are now considered defining elements of the experience of modernity and an indispensable complement to Enlightenment narratives of free individuals and universal progress.[10]

The material properties of the ocean, its ever-moving fluidity, and its underwater worlds provide rich conceptual resources for rethinking life narratives. For instance, the ocean can serve "as a methodological model for nonlinear or nonplanar thought."[11] Kamau Brathwaite's notion of "tidalectic,"[12] which is inspired by the ebb and flow of the sea, offers an alternative cyclical model of history: Distinct from the linear teleology of Enlightenment thinking and autobiography, it opens up alternative temporalities and geographies, and thus invites resistant reading practices.[13] These reading practices also ask us to more thoroughly entangle the economic and the ecological.[14] Besides, oceanic fluidity draws our attention away from the "supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)" of the archive and towards what Diana Taylor calls the "*repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" that frequently constitutes the expression of the colonized.[15] As the stories of the drowned often remain submerged within the ocean without perceptible traces, they challenge scholars to find new ways to approach archival silence. Oceanic connections also invite us to critically question traditional notions of area, nation, and race. This implies, among other things, putting Atlantic and Pacific,[16] white, black, Asian, and indigenous perspectives into conversation with one another. It means, for instance, studying the African diaspora alongside Native American experiences of settler colonialism and alongside South and East Asian diasporas. By way of examples, I would like to point out three different strategies by which pioneering life writing scholars put these theoretical concerns into practice. These strategies include resistant readings of more established sources, the opening up of new digital archives, and attentive approaches to archival silence.

As Lisa Lowe reads the *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) against the liberal-teleological grain, she demonstrates how an innovative angle can tease out new perspectives from an established life writing genre. British abolitionists interpreted this oceanic life narrative, in which the enslaved African subject seems to rise to liberal personhood, as affirmative of the possibilities of individual emancipation, Christian redemption, and liberal economy. Lowe, by contrast, traces the residues of slavery, of the "unremediated collective condition of inhuman cruelty and survival," that defy the hopeful tale of progress. For instance, Equiano's narrative breaks the temporality of emancipation by referencing and echoing Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (1787). The latter narrative affirms that "the bitterness of grief and woe" remains with him despite his manumission. "Slaves, exslaves, and others," Lowe argues, "could 'listen' to the complex tones of

Equiano's narrative, and hear the 'otherness' embedded within the text."[17] Moreover, she exposes how British abolitionism offered an ideological basis for British imperial expansion in Sierra Leone, which she proves to be connected with settlers' wars with native peoples. She then shows how the framework of liberal freedom fostered the transition from slavery to "free" Chinese and Indian labor "recruited" to British, French, and Spanish colonies under indenture. Lowe's transoceanic reading practice disrupts the liberal monohumanist universalism and places it within the critical space of what she characterizes as the transoceanic intimacies of four continents.

When it comes to more recent oceanic migrations, new digital and mobile technologies offer sources for new kinds of narratives. Alfred Hornung's coinage "out-of-life narratives" denotes stories whose migrating subjects are not just "in and out of language, being in and out of worlds," but also "in and out of life," as their humanity is put into question through violent policies. Among others, he includes the texts, images, and data on refugees' smartphones into the category of out-of-life narratives. These life narratives are hardly characterized by unified teleologies. Rather, he argues, they "consist of the random arrangement of exclusively short episodes of exterritorial existence."[18]

Jenny Sharpe, in turn, develops a method of listening to the silence of the archives in her reading of Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Zong!* (2008). This book of poems is based on a legal case that presents the only preserved record of a 1781 incident in which 142 enslaved Africans were thrown overboard and killed so that the slave boat's owners could reap insurance benefits. Framed as a question of insurance fraud, the case in no way acknowledged the humanity of those who drowned. As the ocean swallowed their voices, it is within the gaps of the archives—which *Zong!* reconstructs as graphic gaps on the page—that Sharpe sees "spaces of affect" and "visceral sensations" rather than visual images.[19] She argues that this kind of scholarly work focuses less on offering historical facts than on careful attentiveness to archival silence: "What I am calling an affective relationship to the archive does not involve unearthing new historical data so much as understanding silence as a haunting limit of what was recorded."[20]

Filling the gaps in the post/colonial auto/biographical archives and uncovering "new stories of being human" requires substantial creative efforts both on the part of life writers and of life writing scholars.[21] In this way, the fundamental tension between the desire to include *all lives* in research and teaching and the fact that some subjectivities can barely be perceived outside their own existence may persist. Yet life writing scholars' awareness of the field's limitations and their ingenuity and creativity in seeking to overcome them may well remain a defining feature of the field.

Notes

1 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.

2 Ibid., 2.

3 Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

4 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 4.

5 Walter Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking," in "Globalization and the De-Colonial Option," ed. Walter Mignolo, special issue, *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007): 156, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162498.

6 Katherine McKittrick, "Yours in the Intellectual Struggle: Sylvia Wynter and the Realization of the Living," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

7 Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 14–6.

8 Ibid., 31.

9 Ibid.

10 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993; London: Verso Books, 2002).

11 Hester Blum, "Introduction: Oceanic Studies," in "Oceanic Studies," ed. Hester Blum, special issue, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 10, no. 2 (2013): 151, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2013.785186.

12 Kamau Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* (Rhinebeck, NY: We Press, 1999), 34.

13 Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 1–48; Anna Reckin, "Tidalectic Lectures: Kamau Brathwaite's Prose/Poetry as Sound-Space," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (2003), https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.4.

14 Michelle Burnham, "Oceanic Turns and American Literary History in Global Context," in *Turns of Event: Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies in Motion*, ed. Hester Blum (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 151–71.

15 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

16 Juliane Braun, ""Strange Beasts of the Sea': Captain Cook, the Sea Otter and the Creation of a Transoceanic American Empire," in "Across Currents: Connections between Atlantic and (Trans)Pacific Studies," ed. Nicole Poppenhagen and Jens Temmen, special issue, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 15, no. 2 (2018): 238–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2017.1387462; Burnham, "Oceanic Turns"; DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*; Alexandra Ganser, "From the Black Atlantic to the Bleak Pacific: Re-Reading 'Benito Cereno,'" in "Across Currents: Connections between Atlantic and (Trans)Pacific Stud-

ies," ed. Nicole Poppenhagen and Jens Temmen, special issue, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 15, no. 2 (2018): 218–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2017.1384612; Nicole Popphenhagen and Jens Temmen, "Across Currents: Connections between Atlantic and (Trans)Pacific Studies," in "Across Currents: Connections between Atlantic and (Trans)Pacific Studies," ed. Nicole Poppenhagen and Jens Temmen, special issue, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 15, no. 2 (2018): 149–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2017.1394131. Also see the May 2018 conference on "Transoceanic American Studies" organized by Juliane Braun and Benjamin Fagan at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC.

17 Lowe, *Four Continents*, 58.

18 Alfred Hornung, "Out of Life: Routes, Refuge, Rescue," in "Excavating Lives," ed. Amy-Katerini Prodromou and Nicoletta Demetriou, special issue, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 32, no. 3 (2017): 605, https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2017.1339999.

19 Jenny Sharpe, "The Archive and Affective Memory in M. Nourbese Philip's *Zong!*" *Interventions* 16, no. 4 (2014): 475, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2013.816079.

20 Ibid., 480.

21 McKittrick, "Yours in the Intellectual Struggle," 7.

Outlook on Life Writing and American Studies

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Having discussed five distinct areas of inquiry within life writing studies, we are acutely aware of the various interconnected themes. By way of a conclusion, we would like to sketch three particular aspects which merit extensive attention. First, the fact that all of the contributions highlight the constructedness of life writing can be seen as a call for enhancing our understanding of the mechanisms of self-representation and their implications for the represented autobiographical self and for the multi-genre phenomenon of life writing. The field of life writing studies has been instrumental in uncovering multiple phenotypes linked to medium-specific possibilities and to the contexts in which such content is generated, disseminated, and received. Thus, we will need to grapple further with researching competing and differing media selves, including the roles of curators and adapting generic forms like the scrapbook and the self-help manual as well as the economic backdrop and impact of production and distribution.

Second, our contributions illustrate the ongoing discussion about the mediality of autobiographical self-representation. What are the upsides and downsides of broadening the terms "text" and "discourse" to non-verbal media in life writing studies? Does it suffice to regard such self-depictions as "life narratives," or does this water down the particular capacities of verbal semantics? As our contempla-

tions suggest, inter- and transmedial approaches facilitate research on meaning construction and on understanding genre developments and changes.

Third, the expansive vista of transoceanic American studies, which has problematized the concerns of (hitherto mostly transatlantic and hemispheric) transnational American studies, further develops recent research on land-based as opposed to island-based or marine life narratives. The fact that island and slave ship populations have not been prominent in autobiographical research confirms once again the Western, European, and Euro-American impact on prevailing and general-readership understandings of life writing. Not only the subaltern as a subject of life narrative will be central here but also the telling of supposedly failed lives and of lives lived according to non-Western notions of temporality. Curiously enough, this discussion throws a fascinating light on some of the concerns of hip-hop life writing and its problematic relation to narratives caught between a star's socioeconomic rise and her or his activism on behalf of the disadvantaged.

Further work needs to be done in all of the above areas. Two aspects are most pressing: first, establishing a well-grounded methodology that harnesses the synergies between life writing studies and American studies; second, using 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. As the ever-evolving field imaginary of American studies has led to an expanding perspective regarding the mobility of people and texts, it has become all the more important to avoid sweeping, essentialist, and universalizing categorizations. An interdisciplinary outlook that acknowledges life writing scholarship in specific geographical and sociocultural contexts can support this trajectory.

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Reviews

edited by
Joshua Parker

Abstract

Joshua Parker reviews Corey Dolgon's *Kill It to Save It: An Autopsy of Capitalism's Triumph Over Democracy* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018) and Susan Jacoby's *The Age of American Unreason in a Culture of Lies* (London: Vintage Books, 2018); John Singerton reviews Annemarie Steidl, Wladimir Fischer-Nebmaier, and James W. Oberly's book *From a Multiethnic Empire to a Nation of Nations: Austro-Hungarian Migrants in the US, 1870–1940* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2017) and Günter Bischof's edited volume *Quiet Invaders Revisited: Biographies of Twentieth Century Immigrants to the United States* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2017); Alexandra Ganser reviews Alexa Weik von Mossner's monograph *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017); and Johannes Mahlknecht reviews Joyce Carol Oates's recent book *A Book of American Martyrs* (London: Fourth Estate, 2017).

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Reviews

edited by
Joshua Parker

The Future of US Education

Joshua Parker, University of Salzburg

Books reviewed:
Kill It to Save It: An Autopsy of Capitalism's Triumph Over Democracy.
By Corey Dolgon (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), 320pp.
The Age of American Unreason in a Culture of Lies.
By Susan Jacoby (London: Vintage Books, 2018), 364pp.

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Donald Trump's election brought a wave of popular books for a general readership trying to make sense, as Hilary Clinton's own analysis of the situation attempted, of *What Happened* (2017) onto the market. As American studies grapples with an era offering new fodder for thought on what America means as it moves well into the twenty-first century, two new general audience books look for the root causes of the shift in the political tone to study in America itself: namely, primary and secondary US education.

Stonehill College Professor of Sociology Corey Dolgon's *Kill It to Save It: An Autopsy of Capitalism's Triumph Over Democracy* broadly traces the history and roots of US public education as being from its beginnings in the service of the US economy, but only by the 1990s openly concerned with becoming profit-making itself. Synthesizing a range of sources from de Tocqueville to Georg Simmel, to Lehman Brothers financial reports, to Noam Chomsky, Dolgon lowers charges against economic austerity, broken health care systems, the food industry, standardized testing and charter schools, "junk science," and what Naomi Klein in 2007 dubbed "the shock doctrine," suggesting a right-wing tactic common to them all: a logic of "kill it to save it," a dangerously "common sense" approach to privatization and corporate profit-seeking within the public sphere. In effect, Dolgon writes, over the past two decades, Americans have "handed over the reins of educational reform to marke-

teers and Madmen" (62).

Postwar mass higher education, writes Dolgon, was militaristic, racist and patriarchal, and made the mistake of "ghettoizing" new fields of cultural studies like women's studies and African American studies as they began to appear as forces in the 1960s. With growing stagnation in federal funding for research over the next decades came "partnerships" with private corporate industry, so that, by 2000, academia had "embraced the language and mimicked the practices of corporations themselves" (94). This resulted in a loss of "national culture," as Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* (1996) suggested. "Replacing a commitment to national culture and state-driven imperialism," writes Dolgon, "universities have adopted the language of 'excellence'" (95), a term, Dolgon cleverly notes, "has no meaning outside of comparison"—mainly involving "pseudoscientific proof" of "better" quality through "a language of accounting and assessment, ranking and competition." This, he suggests, is a guise for "outsourcing practically everything: from food, health, and custodial services to staff recruitment, retention management, and—ironically—strategic planning itself," with the aim of attracting "higher paying students and lower paid faculty and staff" (96). The resulting precarity of academic labor leads, in Chomsky's terms, to a "market McCarthyism" within the university.

The result, Dolgon writes, is a "dumbing down" of curricula to keep students happy, while students themselves in turn perform more and more work of "the selecting and dispersing of services and monitoring and evaluating of employees and logistics" (98). Not only are students provided less challenging material, 60% graduate with an average student debt of $33,000 each. With 40% of those now delinquent or in default on loans, Andrew Ross has suggested the system might be seen as a form of modern indentured servitude. Increasingly privatized and profit-driven primary public education systems, in which "failing" schools are cut in funding ("killed" in order "to save them"), funneling students into "charter schools" with, on average, worse outcomes, along with state and federal cuts to health care, research, housing, and transportation, Dolgon jokes in his introduction, are enough to make readers want to slit their wrists or hide in a closet. His work draws on a wide range of sources worth looking at, provided in extensive endnotes.

Both Dolgon's book and Susan Jacoby's *The Age of American Unreason in a Culture of Lies* were begun well before the Trump era, and see the rise of Trump and his appointees as simply an extreme culmination of processes long in development (Jacoby's is an updated version of a 2008 edition). Both are well-crafted, anecdotal portraits of American culture today, covering roughly the same period, the 1960s to the present, suggesting, as Dolgon puts it, that "America's political and cultural consciousness has been rewired since Reagan" (vi).

Jacoby, too, sees an idealized early postwar period as the "good old days," here not for higher education specifically, but for what she lauds throughout her book as "middle-brow culture." Sprouting from a middle-class, nineteenth-century progressivism, the middle-brow culture of postwar America depended on basic skills in critical thinking, which now seems to be failing contemporary America. Jacoby flags three warning signs of a democracy in danger through mis- or under-education: a populace unable to distinguish between coincidence and causation (a basic requirement for scientific literacy), "the appropriation of scientific-sounding language without underlying scientific evidence or logic," and the average American's "lack of understanding of basic mathematical and statistical concepts" (220). Willfully manipulated and exacerbated by a coalition of political and corporate interests, the three weaknesses are played upon, and Jacoby sees the privatization of American public education as a major tool in the project. Her book's copious citations show how publicly-funded state education like that of neighboring Canada out-performs the programs of US charter schools, online university courses, and private for-profit colleges in the United States. "The crisis in contemporary American education," she writes, "has been treated by politicians, on the left and the right, as an affliction confined to a disadvantaged minority of the young, who can be helped by a concerted effort to raise standardized test scores," all the while gearing education toward standardized testing which does little to teach any of "what citizens of a functioning democracy need to know" (309–10). Both in and out of school programs, she suggests, American students are "in thrall to commercially generated images," and suffering from "historical amnesia."

The picture painted by both authors is dark, and without easy solutions. "The triumph of capitalism over democracy," Dolgon writes, "is not just a theoretical platitude from progressive politicos or lefty professors. The real degradation of political discourse and debate, the media's infantilizing of its audiences, and the purposeful dismantling of our rights to be an informed, active electorate (one that actually gets to vote) no longer threaten our democracy—our democracy has been defeated" (208). Both authors largely withhold any tactical suggestions for improvement of the situations they describe (though Dolgon offers a brief overview of recent movements like Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street), viewing the problems they trace and outline not as glitches in the American Dream, but as the intended results of profit-driven private and corporate machinations. Their work isn't a direct call to arms, but a portrait of the otherwise almost invisible landscape in which contemporary Americans find themselves caught.

The Austrian Contribution to American Life Reconsidered

Jonathan Singerton, University of Innsbruck

Books reviewed:
From a Multiethnic Empire to a Nation of Nations: Austro-Hungarian Migrants in the US, 1870–1940. By Annemarie Steidl, Wladimir Fischer-Nebmaier, and James W. Oberly (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2017), 354pp.
Quiet Invaders Revisited: Biographies of Twentieth Century Immigrants to the United States. Edited by Günter Bischof (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2017), 323pp.

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It is funny how one individual can make a big splash in the world. In 1968, E. Wilder Spaulding, then an employee at the US Embassy in Vienna, published his latest hobby history *The Quiet Invaders: The Story of the Austrian Impact Upon America*. Almost fifty years later and twenty-one years after his death, a superb volume under the editorship of Günter Bischof questions Spaulding's central thesis that Austrian immigrants to the United States achieved a "quiet migration." At the same time, another excellent book by a trio of authors focuses on the overlapping processes of migration, return migration, and assimilation by Austro-Hungarian migrants to United States. Both works do much to illuminate the experiences of Austrian/Austro-Hungarian migrants in the long twentieth century, their motivations, their tribulations, and their overall impact on the United States as well as their places of origin. In doing so, both of these books will, like Spaulding, positively shape their respective fields of Austrian-American relations and migration studies for at least the next fifty years.

The core strength of both works is the meticulous attention to detail stemming from deep-archival work. In their book, Annemarie Steidl, Wladimir Fischer-Nebmaier, and James Oberly have demonstrated the power of rigorous archival digging combined with expert analysis. *From a Multiethnic Empire to a Nation of Nations* is a tour de force of source work relying on statistical studies, government documents, migrant ephemera, and local newspapers. Particularly enriching is the plethora of Slavic manuscripts unearthed by Fischer-Nebmaier, which complements the mosaic that these different sources construct. Each author brings a certain speciality to the materials used and a clear fingerprint can be sensed from reading chapters on themes such as a marriage patterns, Slavic identity, and migrant occupations. Although their individual specialisms have concentrated attention towards primarily German-speaking and Slavic groups of migrants, the authors' combined backgrounds give rise to a model interdisciplinary framework for discussing Aus-

tro-Hungarian migration.[1] However, this does not result in a disaggregated style, as the authors have clearly taken great lengths to focus their respective angles on what these sources tell us about the overall migrant experience. This blending of "mixed sources and mixed methods" (25) is a fruitful and, in this case, successful venture.

One of the great payoffs Steidl, Fischer-Nebmaier, and Oberly have to offer is a more humanized view of the Austro-Hungarian migrant. At a time when migrants and migration can be a contentious issue, the authors have reminded us of the very real and pragmatic decisions that influenced immigration and return migration to and from the United States. Most migrants from the different regions of Austria-Hungary, they point out, married within their respective regional communities. The sixth chapter places the marriage factor front and center, yielding many interesting observations such as these marriage preferences being determined by different generational and ethnic attitudes towards endogamy (225) as well as influenced by the benefits to be gained by being already married following more restrictive immigration policies (232). Insights such as these are accentuated by the skillful use of macro and micro data combined with the anecdotal recollections of the migrants themselves.

The theme of identity runs strongly throughout the book from discussions of "identity managers" (40, 79, 92–3, 153–60, for example) to how inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic marriages shaped collective identities (ch. 6). The short section on the purchasing of government war-bonds during the First World War as a test of allegiances for Austro-Hungarian migrants is a particularly fascinating and concise prism (100–5), showing how migrants resisted pressure groups demanding their investment perhaps because of their uncertainties over "which side of the ocean they would live on after the war ended" (105). Economic data is deployed here to an expert degree, not only pointing out how much of an enormous burden this would have been on the relatively stockpiled family savings of Austro-Hungarian migrants but also to show how they generally failed to "participate in the American 'buy now-pay later' credit economy" (104). Economics is given the greatest attention in the final chapter however, which looks at the economic behaviour of Austro-Hungarians in the US. In the discussion on remittances made by Austro-Hungarian migrants to their relatives back home, the authors extrapolate that a staggering sum of $300 million would have flowed back per annum to Central Europe (283). Such an estimation calls to mind again the sense of dual-allegiance and pragmatism, not to mention the necessary frugality, many migrant labourers experienced during their lives on American soil.

Rescue and recapture of the Austro-Hungarian migrant's position within the United States is a common theme to both works and is exemplified in the fact that

Annemarie Steidl and James Oberly are the first of many enjoyable contributions in Günter Bischof's *Quiet Invaders Revisited*. Owing its existence to a scholarly symposium can often mean the resulting edited volume runs the risk of disunity among the contributions once attendees have returned home. Fortunately, this is not the case here. *Quiet Invaders Revisited* is a sterling example, much like the previous work, of what cannot be achieved by the archetypal lone scholar and what is best obtained through collecting a myriad of views. In this regard Bischof has done an outstanding job at compiling a vast array of unique essays by a constellation of scholars that reflects the kaleidoscope of Austrian émigrés who settled in the United States.

Quiet Invaders Revisited features seventeen contributions covering the whole gamut of Austrian migration to North America in the long twentieth century. "Long" because some of the biographical sketches bring us right up to the present day; and, for a similar reason, "North America" since Austrians who relocated to Canada are represented by Andrea Strutz's informative essay and Martina Kaller's acerbic subject Ivan Illich who preferred life in the Caribbean to the US since it reminded him more of his native Brač (21, 282–5). These entries complement the other fifteen which together serve to not only extend our geographic vision but also deepen our understanding of the lives of Austrian immigrants to the United States.

There are three backbones in *Quiet Invaders Revisited* that bind the work together. The first is Bischof's careful and considered curation of the contributions into three overarching sections: "I. Austrian Migration to North America: The Larger Trajectories," "II. Austrian Emigrants/Refugees after World War I: Escaping Economic Hardship and/or Political Persecution," "III. Austrian Refugees/Migrants in the World War II Era: Staying or Returning?" Both World Wars seem to be neat coat-hooks for periodisation. Indeed in the previous work, Steidl, Fischer-Nebmaier and Oberly, noted throughout their work how pivotal the conflicts were in shaping migration patterns and crystallising the position of Austro-Hungarian immigrants already in the United States (e.g. 198, 295–7). The same sort of crux is observed in *Quiet Invaders Revisited* with fascinating chapters such as Kerstin Putz's essay on Günther Anders. As a poet forced to work servile jobs in order to survive, Anders is a typical candidate for the "quiet invader" who was "neither renowned nor financially independent" (239) and whose period of "exile" in the United States between 1936 and 1950 created a trove of unpublished anti-fascist manuscripts which he felt helped to draw ire against the National Socialists but, as Putz convincingly shows, were also "indisputably anti-American" (241).

The second glue between chapters in *Quiet Invaders Revisited* is biography. A central character or sometimes a small selection of people forms the subject of each chapter. Such an approach allows for pinpointed examples which come together to

create a pontillistic overview of the vast range of different Austrian migrants who came to the United States. The fact that biographical writing forms such an important vehicle for uncovering this "invasion" by Austrians is striking, considering the statistical lean of migration studies at a whole. It is even more striking when we bear in mind that historians more generally have a constant interest on the nature of biographical history and its usefulness.[2] In considering this methodological aspect, the volume is rounded off by an expert in the field of historical biography, Volker Depkat, whose conclusion reminds us of the implicit influences behind biographical writing. Immigrant biographies in particular are more susceptible to the pitfalls of the biographical enterprise given the overwhelming propensity for studying the migrant's identity and identity formations. Yet Depkat sees much benefit to be gained for the field of migration studies through the use of biography (305) as long as "biographical approaches to migration history can—and should—do more than just give a face to the faceless mass of migrants" (306). It is entirely fitting that Depkat's stipulation comes at the end of a volume which has demonstrated this ideal use of the biographical method.

The overall spine in *Quiet Invaders Revisited* is, of course, the authors' response to Spaulding's notion of a "quiet invader." Each essay in this volume helps to engage and at times deconstruct Spaulding's terminology. Sometimes vindicating Spaulding in the case of Eva Maltschnig's rich and necessary study of the 5,000 Austrian women who married American GIs and who, as she points out, "blended in easily" to their new lives in the United States (295). Sometimes contributors find fault with Spaulding's thesis like the incomplete assimilation of the Austrian Benedictine monk Thomas Michels explored by Alexander Pinwinkler. In questioning Spaulding's ideas, Dominik Hofman-Wellenhof's chapter does the reader a service by exemplifying the exceptions to Spaulding's epitome of quickly assimilated Austrians. Hofman-Wellenhof's biographical sketches of Ruth Klüger and Frederic Morton, replete with interviews and sensitivity for the biases associated with biographical and autobiographical sources (130), provide a sophisticated take on the conceptual motor behind this volume. He questions helpfully, for example, whether Spaulding was too superficial in his definition of "assimilation" to mean simply finding work and speaking English (133). In sharing two deeply personal journeys, Hofman-Wellenhof demonstrates a pertinent truism for today's world that assimilation is never a "quiet" process but filled with the possibility of failure and numerous bumps along the way.

At the same time, however, a more thorough investigation of Spaulding's notion along these lines would have been desirable. Returning to his 1968 publication, it is quite possible to see the multiple meanings Spaulding referred to when coining the term "quiet invader." There is an obvious interrogation to be made of the loaded term "invader." "Quiet," meanwhile, denotes not only the fact Austrians did not "shout the

achievement of their homelands" but also that Spaulding was reacting against a perceived historiographical silence on the "Austrian contribution" to American life that was not the case for "virtually every [other] people in Europe."[3] While great attention is paid throughout to the keyword "quiet" in this volume—in addition to Hofman-Wellenhof, see Wasserman (163), Lackner (183), and Kaller (277)—there is a need to consider why past historians, academics, and other cultural observers have either forgotten or actively downplayed the Austrian presence in the United States. This is a key question posed at the beginning of *From a Multiethnic Empire to a Nation of Nations*, where the trio ask why is Nikola Tesla "not remembered as the former citizen of Austria-Hungary that he was?" (18). As much as *Quiet Invaders Revisited* tangibly shows that historians are now engaging with the Austrian-American legacy Spaulding advocated, only one of the works under review here has attempted to fully grapple with why this has taken so long to come about.

Reading both books together is a rewarding exercise. Doing so provides the reader with the macro skeleton in the form of large statistical and data-orientated surveys on the one hand and the microscopic cellular characteristics of individual lives within this migration on the other. Both volumes reaffirm Spaulding's belief in the significance of the Austrian/Austro-Hungarian impact upon the United States but they go much further beyond his original study and now convey both the scale and myriad ways this impact occurred. If one individual can make a big splash in the world, then these works go to show just how unique the resulting droplets can be and how important it remains for historians to ensure that they do not evaporate unnoticed from our minds.

Notes

1 Although in this sense minor, for the criticism of neglecting Hungarian migrants,see Nándor F. Dreisziger's review in the *International Migration Review* 52, no. 1 (2018): 317–9, https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918318770149.

2 For recent discussions, see Annette Gordon-Reed, "Writing Early American Lives as Biography," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2014): 491–516, https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.71.4.0491; T. C. W. Blanning and David Cannadine, eds., *Biography and History: Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

3 E. Wilder Spaulding, *The Quiet Invaders: The Story of the Austrian Impact upon America* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterricht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1968), 1, 3.

Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative. By Alexa Weik von Mossner (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), 269pp.

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DOI: 10.47060/jaaas.v1i1.90

In a time in which the consequences of climate change are felt locally and globally, ecocritical scholarship in the humanities is more important than ever if we want to understand what needs to be changed in the relationships between human and nonhuman environments in order to create a future of survival. The present study opens a new book series on "Cognitive Approaches to Culture" (eds. Frederick Luis Aldama, Patrick Colm Hogan, Lalita Pandit Hogan, and Sue Kim) with Ohio State University Press, which is to focus on the "social and political consequences" of cultural expression through cognitive approaches. Alexa Weik von Mossner's monograph takes up this call by studying environmental narratives across a variety of cultural production, from literary texts to film and digital culture or transmedia environments, and how these narratives crucially impact on the viewers' understanding of relations between human and nonhuman environments by involving their empathy and emotions. How different media do so is the main interest of this book.

Affective Ecologies is divided into three main parts: "Sensing Place," "Feeling with Others," and "Experiencing the Future," which follow a general introduction to the topic, in which theoretical underpinnings with regard to environmental narrative, cognitive narratology, embodiment, and emotion are discussed. Quite fittingly, the study opens with a scene from *The Road*, comparing its literary (2006) and filmic (2009) renditions in order to explore each version's sensory appeal as pivotal for environmental (in this case: disaster) stories, thus drawing the reader's attention skillfully to the questions the author is asking and the arguments she is presenting. Part one explores literary and filmic topophilia and creative strategies of evoking emotional ties to places by means of representation, e.g. in John Muir's classic *The Mountains of California* (1875). Muir's non-fictional aesthetic strategies to cognitively evoke the presence of nature on the written page are contrasted with Bonnie Nadzam's *Lamb* (2011), a novel which does the exact opposite, constructing nature as an absence. The comparison results in the conclusion that fiction and non-fiction are similar with regard to their potential for emotional transportation and imagined perception. In the second half of this part, Weik von Mossner explores "filmic foregrounding techniques" (73) and the affective agency of cinematic environments, such as the spectacular landscapes that Siegfried Kracauer found so intoxicating. The disaster genre, the author demonstrates, currently brings to the fore the agency of the environment (e.g. in the Hollywood movie *Twister* [1996]), opposing ideas of nature as passive.

Part two centers on sustainable, empathetic relations between humans and non-humans, taking up current debates in critical animal studies. Here, the notion of strategic essentialism is taken up to understand "strategic empathy" (77) and a critical, self-reflective "strategic anthropomorphism" in the service of "trans-species empathy" (105) as it is used in literature and films such as *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988) and *The Cove* (2009) (the award-winning documentary about dolphin hunting). In this section, Weik von Mossner takes up environmental justice debates and Martha Nussbaum's discussion of the moral effects of reading literature, highlighting the importance of emotions for ideological change (98) in her discussion of two films, *Thunderheart* (1992) and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012).

The third part thinks about the future alongside climate risk narratives and ecotopias (e.g. by T. C. Boyle and Kim Stanley Robinson) and the emotional power they create in the context of dystopian mourning, on the one hand, and ecotopian hope on the basis of conceptions of "ecological citizenship" (Andrew Dobson) and "eco-cosmopolitanism" (Ursula Heise), on the other. It shows how contemporary "cli-fi" balances negative and positive emotions so to keep the audience active rather than depressed (e.g. in *The Day After Tomorrow* [2004]) and how it personalizes the abstract—a prerogative for consciousness-raising and activism—by way of cognitive and affective strategies.

The author's readings are all excellent: sensitive and with great care for relevant yet often overlooked detail. It is laudable that she takes blockbusters and best-sellers as well as independent film equally seriously. Her argument is focused and well-structured into highly readable (sub-)chapters, presenting recent developments and insights from the cognitive sciences that lead to new and convincing interpretations of both well-known and little-explored environmental narratives. Despite the study's aim "to clarify how we interact with environmental narratives in ways that are both biologically universal and culturally specific" (back cover), what I keep wondering, however, is how readerships and their cognitive and affective viewing/reading experiences are "both biologically universal and culturally specific" exactly, and how viewers' emplacements and environmental contexts influence their cognitive and affective responses to any cultural text. The desert, as a case in point, signifies differently in the European as opposed, say, to the Arab imagination; a particular landscape, as another example, will evoke different meanings to colonized and colonizing populations. Especially in the discussion of *Gorillas in the Mist*, this question seems to always lurk in the background and, indeed, becomes manifest in the conflicts between Diane Fossey and the local population that Weik von Mossner mentions. How would the latter react to the film, cognitively and emotionally? The ways in which cognition, embodiment, and emotion are related to cultural background and informed by power relations remains an open question. Especially in the

case of the United States, ecocritical work in African American studies, e.g. by Paul Outka, and postcolonial ecocriticism could be suggestive in this regard. In the same vein, American conceptions of itself as "Nature's Nation" (Perry Miller) and related cultural myths, which keep informing America's imagined relation to the environment (as explored by David Nye and others), might have complicated the cognitive argument. Linking cognitive and contextual approaches might create new theoretical ground for future ecocritical work in literary and cultural studies. Alexa Weik von Mossner's study will certainly be an important cornerstone for such future scholarship.

A Book of American Martyrs. By Joyce Carol Oates (London: Fourth Estate, 2017), 736pp.

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With *A Book of American Martyrs*, Joyce Carol Oates's latest novel, the author tackles one of America's most dividing issues head-on: abortion, and with it the morality behind the opposing ideals of "pro-life" and "pro-choice." With much feeling and, it seems, no mercy, Oates pits representatives of either conviction against one another, as well as against themselves—their anger, grief, frustration, and their faith. That the novel, in its more than 700 pages, allows us to examine our own convictions—or what we think are our convictions—about the (im)morality of legalized abortion, ends up being only one of its merits.

In some detail, Oates traces the lives of two families in the aftermath of the key event that ties them together: the murder of abortion doctor Gus Voorhees and his bodyguard at the hands of the religiously motivated pro-life activist Luther Dunphy. Is it possible, the novel asks, to lament the deeds of either party (killing unborn babies vs. killing "baby killers") and yet admire both characters, Voorhees and Dunphy, not for what they did but for why they did it? For the personal sacrifices they made in order to do what they both believed to be their duty? Is it cynical to call *both* Vorhees and Dunphy "martyrs" (which the novel does, or appears to do), or is that exactly what they both are? Voorhees, who keeps providing abortions to desperate women despite the increasingly violent protests by religious activists, staying true to his unshakeable conviction that a woman must be granted control over her own body no matter what. And Dunphy, who knowingly risks the death penalty for his belief in defending the right to life of unborn children, even if that means destroying the life of others.

Although the plot spirals around these questions by tracing the events in the years following the murder, it is not Voorhees and Dunphy who are the protagonists

of the book, but the families having to live through the aftermath of the killing. In particular, the novel ends up focusing on the daughters of either men; the liberal, sophisticated Naomi Voorhees in one corner, and the fiery, underpriviledged Dawn Dunphy in the other, their fates tied together by their grief over the violent deaths of their fathers (the murder of Vorhees and the execution of Dunphy), and by their respective attempts at dealing with it.

Difficult material, then, and no less so because it often seems that, even after the killing, Oates heaps tragedy upon tragedy, particularly for the Dunphy family, who face—or refuse to face—calamities such as impending financial ruin, drug dependency, and sexual assault. Moments of relief, for all of the characters that populate the book, are few and far between. Naomi, in her attempts to heal, becomes obsessed with gathering material about her father's life and death in order to build a giant archive. (This, conveniently, serves as a literary device that allows us to hear throughout the novel a multitude of different voices interviewed about their personal connections to the murders.) And while witnessing Naomi's struggles to lead a normal life and to bridge the widening chasm between herself and the remainder of her family is never less than interesting, it pales in comparison to Dawn's story. Channeling all her pent-up rage and longing for religious fulfillment into a boxing career, her gradual rise to (near-)stardom outlined in the later chapters of the book is so breathlessly told that it seems like a little novel in its own right. Abandoned is the otherwise all-pervading subject of the book—abortion—in favor of a thrilling, lengthy excursion into the visceral world of female boxing. Here Oates's storytelling bravado more than compensates for what certainly feels like a temporary loss of thematic focus.

And when the threads finally do come together in the end, the result feels true. There are no easy answers for any of the characters, nor for the reader, in *A Book of American Martyrs*, but despite all the anguish and heartbreak the novel is, ultimately, not a book about grief but a book about overcoming grief, and about the many steps it takes to get there—however clumsy, painful, and arduous they may be. A challenging, exhausting, but also a very much rewarding experience.

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