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When Hart Crane arrived in Paris in January 1929, he possessed two letters of introduction which were to facilitate his entrée into the milieu of Parisian literati. One of those letters was from the poet Laura Riding to Gertrude Stein; the other was from the critic Waldo Frank to André Gide, the famous French novelist and future Nobel Prize winner. As Crane’s biographer Clive Fisher notes, Frank had written to Gide “in the hope of doing more than merely projecting his friend into serious French literary circles” (395). In fact, Crane’s friend acted as a matchmaker, believing Gide, whose homosexual leanings were no secret, to be an ideal partner for the younger and undisciplined American poet. Eventually, however, nothing came of Frank’s plans, which Fisher puts down to Crane’s inability to speak French. Six months later, André Gide was among the French intellectuals who provided the Parisian police with character references after Crane had been arrested for starting a brawl at the famous Café Sélect (Fisher 406).

A year before his arrival in Paris, Crane read The Counterfeiters, a novel which Gide had published in 1926. In his biography of the American poet, Fisher does not elaborate on Crane’s response to the novel, nor does he mention Crane’s familiarity with any other work by Gide. From Crane’s letter to Samuel Loveman, we do, however, learn that the American poet “immensely enjoyed” the English translation of the above-mentioned novel by Gide (Fisher 572). In another letter, this time to William Slater Brown, Crane used a Gidean analogy to comment on the wild ways of Los Angeles and Hollywood debauchery: “O Andre Gide! no Paris ever yielded such as this – away with all your counterfeiters!” (Fisher 573). Whatever other effect The Counterfeiters might have produced on the future author of The Bridge, the fact remains that circa 1924-27 – in what might be seen as his most fruitful period – Crane wrote a poem revolving around the same motif which had preoccupied Gide several decades earlier. The Crane poem in question is “Mirror of Narcissus,” long unpublished and included for the first time in the Library of America 2006 edition of Crane’s complete poems. The relevant text by Gide is his 1891 Le Traité du Narcisse. Both offer revealing interpretations of the ancient...
myth, simultaneously transcending it and turning it into a starting point for philosophical, ontological and aesthetic reflections. The two texts are meditations on art and literature, whose relationship with reality is opposed to their connection with the realm of the ideal. Gide and Crane also reflect on the role of the artist, author and thinker. At the same time, Gide’s essay helps to unravel a rather cryptic work by Crane, a famously difficult American poet.

The affinity between Crane and the French symbolists is frequently pointed out. Commonly referred to as “the American Rimbaud,” the author of Voyages is known to have read – or at least been aware of – the work of other symbolist poets as well: Baudelaire, Laforgue, Mallarmé and Valéry. His scarce command of the French language did not preclude Crane from translating three Laforgue poems into English, an obviously painstaking task, performed with the help of a dictionary. Though associated mostly with prose, André Gide, one of the key figures of European modernism, also went through a symbolist phase in the early stages of his literary career (Rogoziński ix; Lagarde and Michard 259). As a very young man, “Ami de Pierre Louÿs et de Paul Valéry, patronné par Mallarmé, il entre de plain-pied dans le monde du symbolisme” (“A friend of Pierre Louÿs and Paul Valéry, under the auspices of Mallarmé, he naturally enters the world of symbolism”) (Lagarde and Michard 259). The subtitle of Le Traité du Narcisse, one of the first works with which Gide made his name on the French literary scene (Rogoziński xi), informs the reader that the treatise is a “theory of the symbol.” It is, to borrow Alan Sheridan’s phrase, “arguably Gide’s most Symbolist work” (73). It is also – apart from being an aesthetic and philosophical essay – a beautiful example of poetic prose. The analogies between Crane’s “Mirror of Narcissus” and Gide’s essay as well as the way the latter illuminates the former might thus be put down to the symbolist background common to both authors, and perhaps also to a certain spiritual and intellectual kinship between Crane and Gide.

“Mirror of Narcissus” is a poem consisting of sixteen lines of varying length. Its rhyme scheme is also irregular. It is based on the recurrence – in lines 6-9, 12, 13 and 16 – of the diphthong /eɪ/ followed by the consonant sound /n/ in words such as pain, which is repeated three times, as well as vain, wane, gain and rain. The poem’s other formal features include the frequent use of alliteration and ambiguous syntax, which are both typical of Crane’s poetic œuvre. The lyric situation in the poem is largely uncontextualized, and the mythological references are only mildly helpful in deciphering the poem’s meanings. Although the layout does not suggest so, “Mirror of Narcissus” seems to be divided into two parts. Each of them is rounded off by a generalization in the form of – respectively – a rhetorical question and an elliptical statement. What might thus be regarded as the poem’s first half reads as follows:
They judge, whose strictures of their sight
Preclude the evidence I speak. And how
Shall I of their dead conscience build the proof
Unto themselves, whereof their birth was God?
Who will but laugh, and lengthily defer
Their heritage, and sneer down all the pain,
And vomit back the incense breathed in vain!
– O minute elegy, pantoufle pain,
O mirror of Narcissus, when is you wane? (125)

The connection with the mythic Narcissus, signaled in the title and the last of the lines quoted above, is given more prominence in the poem’s latter half:

His perfect image dies upon the stage
Or gains, it is no matter for the gods.
The water flows, divides its gain –
Loving the Styx, he sees the rain
Speak otherwise in his own tones
Upon the land he lends such dirges to.

Thy repetition freezes thus my pain… (126)

The use of personal pronouns – especially the they of the first part – with no clear referents, the discursive, prophetic and almost biblical tone of the first half, the rather abstract and vague nature of the notions the speaker feels so strongly about, the apparent lack or weakness of connection between the two parts of the poem – all these elements might confuse and discourage the reader, in particular one unaccustomed to the meanders and pitfalls of Cranean poetics. The relationship between the speaker, whose identity remains mysterious, the they and the he of the second half – who might presumably be identified with Narcissus himself – is unclear. The use of vocables such as pantoufle, untraceable in most dictionaries, does not help. Even the analogy to the myth of Narcissus fails to adequately tease out the poem’s meanings. The enigmatic, elliptical and complex character of Crane’s verse exemplified in the work in question leaves the reader frustrated and resigned to complying with one anthologist’s view of Crane’s poetry as “dependent on a personal, sometimes inaccessible trains of thought” (Baym 2:1648). Such interpretational capitulation should, however, be preceded by attempts to place “Mirror of Narcissus” in a larger, intertextual context, which might offer clues the poet
himself failed to provide or at least sketch out some possible directions. One way to do this is perhaps to look at Gide’s *Le Traité du Narcisse*.

Given Crane’s and Gide’s sexual preferences and the fact that their works may often be classified as instances of the homosexual text, it seems tempting to see the former’s poem and latter’s essay in the light of the homoerotic dimension of Narcissus’s myth. Such a dimension is frequently exploited in both popular and high culture. Indeed, the archetypal story of the beautiful young man who rejects femininity personified by the beautiful nymph Echo to fall in love with his own reflection – and thus with a masculine image – easily lends itself to such a sexual interpretation. It is equally tempting to refer to psychoanalysis and the psychological concept of narcissism first identified by Sigmund Freud, who defined it as obsessive preoccupation and fascination with one’s own body. In the present essay, however, I would like to focus on purely literary, aesthetic and philosophical considerations, with particular emphasis on symbolist poetics and its Platonic roots.

The ancient myth constitutes the point of departure for Gide’s *Le Traité du Narcisse*, which is dedicated to the author’s friend and symbolist poet Paul Valéry, who gave expression to his own fascination with Narcissus in several poems. Among the qualities of Narcissus which Gide emphasizes are – apart from the obvious, that is the youth’s beauty – his perfection and purity. In the introduction to his treatise, Gide inevitably refers to the themes of self-love and contemplation of one’s own reflection. Importantly, he also points out the hieroglyphic nature of myths, as well as reminds the reader of their religious dimension. Looking at the role of myths in the distant past, the French writer distinguishes between common people who were delighted with the mythical stories but failed to understand them and the priests who pondered on the image to grasp its hidden meaning. It is this process of interpretation that Gide perceives as the origin of all literature.

Gide’s Narcissus is presented as self-absorbed and detached from his surroundings, which appear to be shapeless and colorless. Bored, lonely and confused, Narcissus longs to see his own face and look into his own soul. In Gide’s essay, Narcissus is also time-bound: the river in which he is about to see a reflection is the “fleuve du temps” (“the river of time”) (6) and the inexorability of the passage of time as well as the transience of all things is stressed by the author. When Narcissus leans over the surface of the water, he sees reflected in it all the elements of the surrounding landscape. It is only then, it seems, that the sky, mountains, trees and flowers start existing for him: in a peculiar solipsism, they acquire shape and color thanks to Narcissus’s act of looking. He asks himself whether it is his own soul that moves the images or whether it is the images that move his soul. His admiration for what he sees soon, however, gives way to the realiza-
Hart Crane’s and André Gide’s Readings of the Myth of Narcissus

Narcissus’s dissatisfaction allows Gide to introduce the motif of paradise, thereby pointing to the Platonic origins of literary symbolism. In Gide’s version of the myth, which intersperses ancient Greek and Christian motifs, Narcissus begins to dream of the Garden of Eden, which is at the same time the “Jardin des Idées” (“the Garden of Ideas”) (7), the realm of perfect, individual, unique forms. Enchanting, colorful and pure, Gide’s beautiful garden, where appearances are never deceptive, is composed of essences, immobile, immutable and timeless. The absolute perfection of the place is at once mathematical and musical, the latter bringing to mind the musicality which rose to prominence in French symbolist poetry. The focal point of the garden is the logarithmic tree, which is the reservoir of truth, mystery and hieroglyphs. The harmonious symmetry of this Gidean Eden, which is complete in itself, reveals an obvious parallel with Plato’s philosophy. Narcissus leaning over the surface of the water is thus akin to the prisoners in Plato’s cave, who, with their backs to the source of light, can only see shadows rather than the real objects which cast them. As long as they are enslaved by their senses, the prisoners take the shadows of real things for the things themselves. Gide’s treatise is rooted in Plato’s theory of ideas, which are spiritual, eternal and immutable. They are also endowed with a true, autonomous existence in a higher ideal world, superior to the material world, which is merely its imperfect reflection, composed of individual, changeable things. It is the contemplation of permanent, timeless ideas which is, according to Plato, the aim of philosophy.

The Gidean paradise of primary forms is, of course, lost. Its one-time inhabitant, Adam, a unique and sexless being, becomes bored with the perfection of the place and impatient to dissociate himself from the realm of things. He wishes to see, for once, himself rather than just the ideal forms which surround him, existing for him and through him. Succumbing to temptation, he breaks one branch of what may presumably be referred to as the Tree of Knowledge, though Gide does not call it so. The act results in Adam being split into two sexual beings, incomplete, tormented by fear and consumed by desire for each other. It is thus that time comes into being, and the sad history of mankind begins. From now on, disintegration sets in and it is the task of prophets and poets to strive for wholeness in an impossible attempt to regain paradise.

The fact that in his essay Gide shifts from the figure of Narcissus to that of the biblical Adam, and then back to Narcissus, is suggestive of the analogy he notices between the mythological protagonist and his Christian counterpart. Narcissus’s desire to stop the passage of time symbolized by the flow of the river is expressive of the vain human attempt to regain the lost garden of ideal forms and the timeless, archetypal harmony they

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embody. Gide wishes Narcissus looked back to see the actual landscape rather than its mere reflection, unstable and constantly changed by the movement of the water. If the river stopped flowing, the reflections in the now immobile mirror of the water would finally correspond to the more static shapes which are reflected. The story of Narcissus thus becomes a metaphor for the human yearning to return to Eden, and for each thing’s dramatic struggle to recover its lost, divine, eternal shape. It also becomes Gide’s point d’appui for a historiosophical conclusion. There are moments in history, Gide claims, when time seems to slow down and silence follows. It is, however, an apocalyptic silence, marking the dawn of new eras. Inevitably, however, such new, promising thresholds are ruined by sin, which time and time again rules out the possibility of regaining paradise. In Le Traité du Narcisse, it is the Crucifixion that exemplifies Gide’s theory. What is left is religious worship, which, Gide concludes, would be superfluous – or, as the French writer puts it, “une messe suffirait” (“one mass would suffice”) (14) – if we really knew how to look attentively at what we see.

In the conclusion of his treatise, Gide identifies the poet as the one whose task it is to recreate paradise, to cast the imperfect, distorted appearances beneath which true, ideal forms are concealed, waiting to reappear. The poet’s task resembles that of the scholar: both search for archetypal, primary forms, but the former is bolder, more creative and more inclined to guess rather than look for axioms. The archetype is to be found beneath the symbol, the transient, temporal appearance which clothes it and which the layman fails to transcend. The symbol, which Gide defines as “tout ce qui paraît” (“everything that appears”) (13), is the object of the poet’s contemplation and meditation aimed at reaching the essence of the thing, which is the Idea, capitalized in the text of Le Traité du Narcisse. Gide also describes the work of art as crystalline, like the idea itself: it is in fact a kind of “paradis partiel” (“partial paradise”) (14), a new Eden, where ideas flourish harmoniously and symmetrically, and where words and thoughts coexist, the former never endangering the latter and being “transparentes et révélatrices”! (“transparent and revealing”) (14). Able to rise above time, immersed in silence and light, the artist is able to capture the idea, which – like paradise itself – exists out of time. In the final paragraphs of Gide’s essay, the figure of the artist gives way to that of the lonely Narcissus, contemplating his face reflected in the water and consumed with self-love and a desire which cannot be fulfilled, since its object is his own image, bound to vanish the moment he tries to approach it. The conclusion, Gide tells us, is that one must not desire an image, because desire is precisely what destroys it. That is why Narcissus can only contemplate the image, which is a mere appearance, becoming himself a symbol and feeling, as Gide puts it, “résorbées, les générations humaines qui passent” (“the passing human generations he has absorbed”) (15).
Filtered through the lens of the ideas expressed by Gide in Le Traité du Narcisse, Crane’s “Mirror of Narcissus” acquires new dimensions, or rather reveals those “undercurrents of meaning” – to borrow Edgar Allan Poe’s term – which do not necessarily strike the reader upon a cursory acquaintance with the poem. The speaker’s situation suddenly becomes clearer, and its dramatic nature fully graspable. The clash between the poetic persona and the mysterious “They” evoked in the poem’s first line suddenly turns out to result from the insurmountable barrier separating the isolated individual whose prophetic gift enables him to see further and transcend the immediate reality from a majority limited by the “here and now.” It is, in other words, the opposition between the Gidean poet – or, indeed, the artist in general – and the Gidean Narcissus, whose limitations are those of the poor human race. The “strictures of their sight” – the moral or spiritual limits which bind people – “Preclude the evidence I speak,” thus limiting the poet’s self-expression. Of course, he is not “precluded” – or prevented – from expressing himself in the literal, physical sense, but what he has to say is met by a wall of incomprehension or derision:

Who will but laugh, and lengthily defer
Their heritage, and sneer down all the pain,
And vomit back the incense breathed in vain!

The somewhat solecistic structure of Crane’s poem makes it hard to determine whether the derisory laughter, followed by contempt and rejection, actually comes from the poet’s fellow human beings and results from their failure to understand him, or whether the reaction evoked in the passage quoted above is that of some indifferent, vaguely divine power, as the preceding lines might suggest: “And how,” the speaker asks, “Shall I of their dead conscience build the proof / Unto the mselves, whereof their birth was God?” Whatever the answer, the fact remains that the speaker seems to be on a mission to reveal some spiritual truth to which solely he has access and which, sadly, no-one wants to hear. It seems that Crane’s poet is at pains to reestablish the lost connection between the human race and its spiritual origins, that – in other words – his is a struggle to allow mankind to at least catch a glimpse of the lost paradise evoked in Gide’s essay. Like the French writer, Crane refers to some failed religious ritual – hence “the incense breathed in vain” – and the masses who are no longer able to bridge the gap between their present and their spiritual heritage, the distance being such that even a prophetic intermediary who brings vital “evidence” or “proof” cannot help them.

Pain, a motif which recurs in Crane’s poem, appears to be inscribed in the speaker’s situation. It is the pain which is “sneered down,” the pain referred to in the exclamatory
lines closing the first part of the poem, and the pain evoked in the final line. The second
and third of these references associate the pain with the figure of Narcissus, though the
one suffering seems to be mainly the poet-speaker. When he exclaims “– O minute ele-
gy, pantoufle pain, / O mirror of Narcissus, when is your wane?” we realize that the
speaker’s suffering is caused by his failure to get his message across, to communicate his
vision to his fellow human beings. It is so because the latter suffer from what might be
called Narcissus’s syndrome: they are self-centered, bound by time and thus imprisoned
in their own mortality, which is why theirs is a “dead conscience.” The aim of the speak-
er’s painful struggle is to bring back the realm of the ideal, the timeless and the absolute,
to revive mankind’s memory of paradise. The poet-speaker longs for the decline or
“wane” of the “mirror of Narcissus” because it would be tantamount to his own mission
being accomplished. As it is, the condition of men seems similar to that of Narcissus as he
is depicted in the second part of Crane’s poem. Crane’s Narcissus bears a strong resem-
blance to his Gidean counterpart: “His perfect image dies upon the stage / Or gains” and
“The water flows.” As in Gide’s essay, Narcissus’s reflection alternately appears and
disappears, depending, presumably, on whether the beautiful youth approaches or moves
away from the surface of the water, whose flow – like the passage of time – cannot be
stopped. The fact that Gide’s Narcissus and, consequently, humankind are time-bound
also finds its analogy in Crane’s poem. The realm in which Narcissus exists is marked by
death:

    Loving the Styx, he sees the rain
    Speak otherwise in his own tones
    Upon the land he lends such dirges to.

In “Mirror of Narcissus,” the passage quoted above is followed by the poem’s closing
line, which, however, comes after a double space. It seems that Crane wants to emphasis
the distance between the figure of Narcissus and that of the poet-speaker, who
somewhat resignedly concludes “Thy repetition freezes thus my pain...” If one takes
a closer look at the word “repetition,” one realizes that it may mean “copy” or “imitation,”
thus referring to the image or reflection which so absorbs Narcissus that it leads to his
downfall: the Narcissus of the Greek legend, it must be remembered, pined away or, in
other versions of the myth, committed suicide, knowing his love could never be fulfilled.
In Crane’s poem, however, it seems that Narcissus’s complete absorption in what he sees
is detrimental to the speaker’s condition as well. Though it is said to “freeze” the speak-
er’s “pain” – and thus, as if, relieve the speaker’s suffering – we soon come to under-
stand that the meaning of the verb “freeze” is by no means positive. The verb might in
fact be synonymous with “kill,” “make motionless, fixed or stiff,” “remove sensation from” or “frighten or discourage by unfriendly behavior.” “Freezing” might also be synonymous with “being made speechless.” Lexical analysis, backed by a reading of *Le Traité du Narcisse*, lends a new meaning to the poem’s final line. It is possible that the poet-speaker is in fact disheartened by the incomprehension he faces, by the Narcissus-like attitudes he witnesses. He wishes to bring the ideal and the absolute closer to other people, but his efforts are hampered by the time-bound and death-tainted realm in which he exists. Thus interpreted, “Mirror of Narcissus” turns out to be a work dealing with the poet’s fate, with the clash between his absolutist aspirations and the limitations to which most people are subject; a poem about the struggle to make one’s own poetic voice heard and understood, but also a struggle with one’s own weakness and discouragement, with the self-doubt resulting from doubt on the part of those whom the poet addresses and who fail to share his vision.

In a note made in 1890, while work on *Le Traité du Narcisse* was in progress, Gide expounds on some of the views expressed in his treatise. Central to this note is the notion of truth, which is to be found behind each phenomenon. All phenomena are symbols, and the artist’s duty is to disclose the truths they stand for. According to Gide scholar Alain Goulet, the author of an article published in a special issue of *Le Magazine Littéraire* devoted to Gide as “the most modern of all classic authors,” among the factors determining Gide’s modernity is his belief that a true artist is one with a sense of mission and responsibility, driven by moral imperatives (74). In Gide’s eyes, an artist who fails to reveal the truth is immoral, and his art useless. On no condition should self-respecting artists – or, for that matter, scientists – put themselves before the truth they are to express. An aesthetic dimension corresponds to the moral one: language should never obscure or overshadow the truth – or, as Gide puts it, the Idea – and thus should never come before it. It is a precept to which Gide was to remain faithful, creating a literary style which encourages a comparison between the language of his prose and crystal (Rogoziński 15). Gide’s approach, though expressed in “moral” terms, is by no means moralistic. Nor is it utilitarian: the fact that art which fails to evoke an Idea is useless does not mean that the Idea which is to be evoked has to be useful in the conventional sense of the term. Gide hastens to add that the truth the artist reveals may in fact be immoral, it may shock and offend the general public. Artistic integrity, however, consists in being moral to the point of incurring indignation, disapproval and accusations of immorality. Artists are, in other words, immoral moralists or moral immoralists, and must be prepared to pay a price for it. They must be ready for self-sacrifice and self-denial. In this light, Gide’s allusion to the Crucifixion in the treatise acquires a new dimension: one is almost tempted to draw a parallel
between the artist and Christ, based on their shared selflessness and their readiness to suffer and sacrifice themselves.

The concerns voiced by Gide in the note may be similar to those that cause the speaker of Crane’s “Mirror of Narcissus” to speak of his pain being “freezed” with what I read as regret. Perhaps it is so because, like Gide, Crane sees suffering and sacrifice as inevitably inscribed in the poet’s fate. A reading of what is arguably Crane’s most important prose text, the essay entitled “General Aims and Theories,” reveals other interesting analogies to Le Traité du Narcisse, and seems to support my interpretation of “Mirror of Narcissus.” In his essay, Crane gives voice to the belief that “there are few common terms, general denominators of speech that are solid enough or that ring with any vibration or spiritual conviction” (161). Crane’s statement that “The great mythologies of the past (including the Church) are deprived of enough façade to even launch good raillery against” (161) seems to echo the skepticism with which Gide speaks of the multitude of masses celebrated in vain. He also refers to the question of artistic integrity when he observes that “a poet will accidentally define his time well enough simply by reacting honestly and to the full extent of his sensibilities to the state of passion, experience and rumination that fate forces on him, first hand” (161).

In “General Aims and Theories,” Crane claims that “certain as yet undefined spiritual quantities, perhaps a new hierarchy of faith not to be developed so completely elsewhere” are “to be discovered” in America (161). He also adds, “in this process I like to feel myself as a potential factor” (161). The above quotations confirm the commonly held view according to which “Crane believed that poets had access to a higher state of consciousness than others” (Baym 2:1648). In the essay, Crane goes on to agree with those who call him “an ‘absolutist’ in poetry” (162) and defines this poetic absolutism by contrasting it with “the impressionistic method” (162), that is the method adopted by the poet who “creates only with the eye and for the readiest surface of the consciousness” (162-63). To this, Crane opposes his concept of a poem which is

at least a stab at a truth, and to such an extent may be differentiated from other kinds of poetry and called ‘absolute.’ Its evocation will not be toward decoration or amusement, but rather toward a state of consciousness, an ‘innocence’ (Blake) or absolute beauty. In this condition there may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous precepts or preconceptions. (163, italics mine)

In “General Aims and Theories,” Crane pays considerable attention to the formal and linguistic aspects of poetry, namely to his celebrated concept of the logic of metaphor.
Nevertheless, he perceives the poet as a visionary and a prophet whose main task is to communicate some deeper truths. Crane realizes that contenting oneself with a surface created by language or preconceived notions would be tantamount to remaining a Narcissus, one who is so overwhelmed by appearances that he is incapable of transcending them. Crane’s poet – like Gide’s artist – is in fact an anti-Narcissus, because he does not let images limit him, because he is determined to unveil the ideas behind the images. Therein lies his integrity, his morality which obliges him to reveal the truth and spread the word rather than be content with merely arranging words. Only thus understood can art and poetry transcend the temporal and approach the timeless, of which Narcissus – self-centered and steeped in time – may dream, but which he will never reach. Such a view of the role of artists and poets is a romantic one, as is the belief that artists and poets are by definition self-sacrificing and unselfish sufferers. In his study of Hart Crane, Gordon A. Tapper interprets Crane’s refusal to create poetry which is merely “impressionistic” as proof that his poetics is “rooted in the concept of what Frank Ker-mode calls the ‘Romantic Image’: ‘a means to truth, a truth unrelated to, and more exalted than, that of positivist science, or any observation depending upon the discursive reason’” (42). Tapper places his observation in the context of Crane’s Imagist leanings, arguing that the poet of The Bridge “sets himself apart from poets who adopted the stylistic precepts of Imagism to the exclusion of its more conceptual implications” (42-43). It is precisely such “conceptual implications” that Sheridan identifies as the basis of the conviction around which Gide’s essay revolves. As has already been mentioned, Le Traité du Narcisse is a symbolist treatise. However, Sheridan argues that it also contains a critique of symbolism. Thus, the essay, and particularly the note which accompanies it, might be seen as Gide’s

departure from dominant Symbolist thinking in the name of that Gidean constant, sincerity. Most of the Symbolists took little account of some putative Truth behind the Symbol – the Symbol was an end in itself, was encouraged to prefer itself. For them, the Symbol might manifest the Truth, but the Truth must remain forever veiled within it: once the Symbol was there, any concern for Truth became superfluous, indeed a kind of unSymbolist vulgarity. (Sheridan 74)

In modernist literature, the focus often shifts from content to form, and from the reality referred to by language to language itself. Despite being modernists, Crane and Gide refuse to content themselves with literature which is merely “impressionistic” or decorative, or in which “the primacy of Truth over the Symbol” (Sheridan 74) becomes the primacy of the symbol over the truth. Their refusal to do so might be motivated by the
fear that literature and art separated from the essential ideas they are to express will be reduced to the condition of the image admired by Narcissus, and will become – like him – self-absorbed and self-loving, but ultimately as perishable and doomed to failure as the image devoid of the idea behind it, and as Narcissus himself.

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Gertrude Stein’s venture into detective fiction is intimately bound to her life-long fascination with the contemporary, mainly American, mass culture. She was herself an avid reader of detective stories, confessing to her partiality for Edgar Wallace and befriending Dashiell Hammett during her American tour of 1934, also analyzing the peculiar aesthetics of a typical whodunit in at least several of her lectures or essays. Her lively interest in mass culture had far-reaching consequences for her writing techniques, also deeply influencing her ideas and intuitions concerning the gendered nature of the processes of human cognition. First of all, her undisguised admiration for what she called the American “space of time” with the effect of mobility it engendered prompted her to apply the concept in her own representations of what she defined as “the period of the cinema and series production,” which ultimately led her to develop the aesthetics of “nondevelopmental forms of self-containment as a kind of national or cultural characteristic emblematic of modernity” (Parry 73). The poetics of the self-contained fragment, enveloped as it was in the hermetic, nontransparent texture of Stein’s difficult form and style, induced many canonical modernist critics to look at her experimentation as typical of the period, although generally considered too radically obscure and elitist even for a sophisticated modernist reader.

On the other hand, however, her repeated engagement with the ordinary domestic sphere, as emblematised e.g. in Tender Buttons, caused many contemporary critics and admirers of high art to associate Stein with “the feminine realm of consumerism, romantic affection, and quotidian, material life – and worse, a homoerotic version of that realm
where the creative place of the heroic male artist figure has been usurped by the figures of the cook and the seamstress” (Pitchford 660). In this way, the unique condensation of the formal and stylistic obscurity that the mainstream critical opinion was ready to embrace as characteristic of the time’s aesthetic idiom became in Stein’s case an object of ridicule and was frequently rejected: although not as marginalized as other contemporary female writers, Stein was nevertheless considered an odd, eccentric and controversial figure, even if her merits as a radical avant-gardist were recognized and celebrated. Even a late admirer such as Richard Kostelanetz, in the introduction to his edition of *The Yale Gertrude Stein* of 1980, while associating Stein with the modernist literary giants like Joyce, Faulkner, or Pound, discovers in her a degree of idiosyncrasy that went perhaps too far to treat her throughout with steadfast seriousness: “Not unlike other American geniuses, Stein walked the swampy field between brilliance and looniness; and even today, as in her own time, her works are perceived as extraordinary or mad or, more precisely, both” (XVII). Nevertheless, whether considered mad or courageous, her persistent formal idiosyncrasy, matched as it was with the homely, popular and domestic, created an inimitable Steinian variation of the modernist avant-garde which slowly worked to undermine the elitist division of culture into high and low.

Stein’s pervasive interest in the movies, automobiles (she owned a succession of Fords herself), and detective stories made her sensitive to the rhythms of twentieth-century modernity and its discourses which she creatively introduced in her own writing – through characteristic repetitions which, as she contended, were not repetitions at all as they differed from one another, even if only in tiny details; through the polyphonic, depersonalized narration, and through the ellipsis and parataxis of her unique grammar and stylistic manner. It is important to notice how the peculiar combination of obscurity with the trivial, banal, and domestic aspects of reality appeared to exclude any serious political and social concerns: while the mainstream interpreters of modernist experimentation precluded high art’s connections to the political and the public as a pre-condition of aesthetic perfection, the contemporary Marxists like Brecht or Adorno testified to the opposite, arguing for the political, revisionist, and potentially revolutionary impact of the characteristically modernist ways of refracting rather than reflecting the social reality. The high modernist critics of either ideological persuasion as a rule perceived mass culture as no culture at all, warning against its deadening, even fascist influence on the unthinking masses, at the same time associating its destructive triviality with the domestic and the feminine, the connection diagnosed and analyzed in Andreas Huyssen’s well-known *After the Great Divide* of 1986. In this context, Stein’s implications in the popular aspects of contemporary culture confused any attempt to see her as a serious observer and critic of the waste land of the “botched” modern civilization. Thus, the ways in which
Gertrude Stein's Blood on the Dining Room Floor

she managed to unsettle, while also paradoxically reinforcing, the contemporary cultural systems, institutions and codes of producing truth and meaning became visible only with hindsight, from a much later, postmodern, critical perspective (Berry 133).

The intention of this paper is to examine Stein’s investments in the contemporary popular literary discourses as practiced in the genre of the detective story, in the form which she had herself devised to overturn, or at least to question the detective narrative’s basic conventions and ideological assumptions. In this study I wish to discuss the hitherto very much doubted and contested visibility of the socio-cultural context as, in this case, evinced in the avant-garde and experimental modernist text primarily foregrounding the material solidity of language, using the example of Gertrude Stein’s famous detective story, Blood on the Dining Room Floor from 1933. Stein’s preoccupation with the social aspects of her lived experience in this work took the form of recording the strange habits, reactions, and in general threatening presence of the local people, inhabitants of the French countryside, serving as transients, i.e. mobile domestic servants, and it is the persistent, if also vague, anxiety pervading the whole text of Blood on the Dining Room Floor, that turns this particular motif into the formal dominant of her “mystery” narrative.

Although apparently unconscious, the mode of Stein’s fragmentary but nearly obsessive recourse to this social aspect of her daily existence is at times uncannily reminiscent of the contemporary discourses of American sociologists concerning the phenomenon of unchecked social mobility that accompanied the emergence of consumer capitalism as the result of what was termed Second Industrial Revolution (cf Kenner 9-11). As reported by Michael Trask in his Cruising Modernism, the social thought of the first half of the twentieth century in America was obsessively preoccupied with the problem of the subversive potential of the migrant work force, represented by the uncontrolled mobility of “a new working class characterized by an untraditional makeup of women, foreigners, transients, and casual laborers” (1). The critic discusses, for example, Henry James’s ideas on immigration and his fears originating from the fact that “[n]o longer conforming to the inherited view of underclass peasants as stationary and subordinate… the Italian immigrant emerges in turn-of-the-century life as the dismantler of traditional social hierarchies and the epitome of groundlessness” (5). The association of James’s social views with Stein’s is only seemingly extravagant: “during her actual trip to America [in 1934], she comes close to identifying with James’s own experiences and attitudes toward both the country and its language. Indeed, Stein’s entire experience in the States parallels James’s 1904 trip to America, the first after a twenty-year absence” (Nadel 91).

It is also James who in The American Scene describes a peculiar and telling encounter of an affluent “native” and a group of immigrant Italian workers, which in his eyes testi-
fied to the insurmountable social and cultural division between the inscrutable and inferior aliens and an enlightened representative of the Anglo-American upper middle class:

To pause before them, for interest in their labour, was, and would have been everywhere, instinctive; but what came home to me on the spot was that whatever more would have been anywhere else involved had here inevitably to lapse. What lapsed, on the spot, was the element of communication with the workers, as I may call it for want of a better name; that element which, in a European country would have operated from side to side, as the play of mutual recognition, founded on old familiarities and heredities, and involving, for the moment, some palpable exchange. The men, in the case I speak of, were Italians, of superlatively southern type, and any impalpable exchange struck me as absent from the air to positive intensity, to mere unthinkability. It was as if contact were out of the question and the sterility of the passage between us recorded with due dryness, in our staring silence. (quoted in Boelhower 445)

The awkwardness of the encounter finds an additional reflection in the text, in James’s unusually, even for this author, contorted syntax (Boelhower 445). On the whole, the import of his musing amounts to a view that, while in Europe, where modernity and the related sense of violent social transformation were less felt and visible, a kind of friendly contact would have been possible and even warmly welcome, in America, the unexpected meeting of one’s social others, complicated by ethnic difference and lack of a common medium of communication, led to silence and indifference which could only generate anxiety and fear in someone reflecting on the mass character of the transatlantic influx of laborers and the omnipresence of the immigrant other.

The sense of otherness, alienation and lack of human contact conveyed in James’s passage could have been additionally increased by the impossibility to communicate in the same language, or speak it with equal fluency, which might have enabled a friendly if also casual exchange. While in Europe, the upper class stroller would probably speak the same language as the workers, or if he were a foreigner, he would probably feel obliged to talk to them in their native language or dialect; in America, such ways of an assumed social propriety were absent since the whole situation was culturally new and this kind of inter-class, inter-ethnic contact remained as yet unrecognized and uncodified in the sphere of manners or the sense of social decorum. It is precisely this socio-linguistic aspect of the economically and culturally imposed necessity of brushing up against one’s social inferiors, the more or less anonymous and ever-changing domestics, that seemed to deeply preoccupy Gertrude Stein in *Three Lives* and in her detective novel. There was, however, fascination as well as profound anxiety in her rendering of this odd proximity,
if not intimacy, with strangers, which prompted her to turn the figures of her servants into a constant source of apprehension, if not fear, in her detective novel where they were persistently alluded to as potential and most probable miscreants and perpetrators of evil doings.

*Blood on the Dining Room Floor* has been by now widely discussed and copiously and variously interpreted not only because of its revision and reworking of the traditional model of detective fiction. As critical treatments of this novel testify, the characters and events depicted in this quasi-narrative, in Stein’s typical, nontransparent, fragmentary and repetitive fashion, have been mostly based on occurrences and people the author encountered in real life. She started to write the novel in 1933, after the tremendous success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, published a year before. The huge applause and celebrations that followed that publication, although coveted by Stein who felt that her writing was ignored or at best thought eccentric, caused a writing block in the usually very prolific and enthusiastic writer, probably because of her fears at having been “consumed” by the mass reader (Chessman 161). Writing this novel in Bilignin, the location of her and Toklas’s residence in the French countryside, she related strange events that had taken place in the neighborhood, wreaking havoc, causing wonder, and, most frequently, evoking fear and excitement. Although the events referred to in a hazy and discontinuous manner remain unclear and chaotic till the very end of *Blood*, critics can also rely on Stein’s much more coherent and consistent report in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, which enables the readers to recreate the sequence of mysterious occurrences in summer 1933, which were the direct inspiration for writing her detective novel. The central event was Mme Pernollet’s death by falling out of the window of her husband’s hotel in the nearby town of Belley. Stein and Toklas knew the couple, stayed at their hotel, and were duly horrified by this accident which was also interpreted as murder or suicide by the town’s inhabitants. Stein’s novel seems to suggest the writer’s own serious doubts as to the causes of this tragic death: she mentions the impervious “inside” of the hotel-keeper’s household, rumors of the husband’s infidelity, as also the strange maneuvers of the mysterious figure of Alexander, the local horticulturist (gardener), whose sister worked in the hotel as a servant and was suspected of plotting with her brother to insidiously ingratiates herself with M. Pernollet in order to eventually oust his wife from her position in the business. Brief mentions of this apparently treacherous servant and her brother appear here and there throughout the whole text.

*Blood* consists of twenty one chapters of highly unequal length: while the first chapter takes up about eighteen pages and is the longest, the others occupy the space from two to four pages or contain only one sentence or phrase. The longest, first chapter brings details of the lives of two families: the hotel keeper’s and the horticulturist’s, the
latter being Alexander’s father. These details remain unclear and interchangeable, so we are never sure as to where pieces of someone’s story belong, not to mention any appearance of chronological sequence. We can only guess, for instance, that the information about a crying woman in the first chapter pertains to the hotel keeper’s wife, and not, say, to a servant seduced by the owner, because such a motif also appears in the text:

All this time she was at home, home at the hotel…. Every day and every day she had to see that everything came out from where it was put away and that everything again was put away…. She cried when she tried but soon he did not try and so she did not cry. As a day was a day it came to be that way. But it was never only a day, and that a little left it to her still to cry…. In this way one day she tried to find the night beside and when she tried to find the night beside, she cried. But she did not care to die. (10)

The monotony of the words “day,” “way,” and “night” repeated in this passage seems to render the character of the hotel keeper’s wife’s existence, and her trying and crying refer to her hard work and then possibly to the discovery of her husband’s unfaithfulness, suggesting at the same time that her eventual death was not suicide (“she did not care to die”). What follows is a recourse to the family history: “Just how she did everything. But it was very sweet and very feminine. And she did everything and her husband came home from the war and there were four children.” An important aspect of the story is the economic one: “They grew richer and richer,” yet while the hotel owner had come from a well-to-do family, her origins were humble: “She had come from poor people and he had not” (11), which might have had some bearing on the events that followed.

However, as mentioned above, the hotel keeper’s family is not the only one to occupy the narrator: another story suggested is that of the horticulturist family in which there were eight children, and the eldest one was the said Alexander. Among diverse and scattered facts (they were religious “in their way,” they might be rich but if they suffered from poverty, they had suffered long, Alexander’s brothers “stayed at home and carried their garden with them wherever they went” [15], etc.), the most important was the strange disappearance of the father of the family which the narrator seems to associate with the gloomy and towering figure of Alexander, and which is related in a passage bearing indirect affinity to Freud’s notion of the uncanny:

And so here he was and his brothers and sisters, here he was, and his mother, here he was. And a father. A father who lived alone, who owned and owned and lived alone, and had a cataract in one eye and nobody saw anybody cry but they worked all day too soon.
…Once the eldest brother with a watering can, a kind of apron on, and a watering can which he waved and between him and the one that came was a man. Who was the man. A stout man, all the others were thin, a walking man, all the others bowed and ran. Who was this man, and he was in between.
I feel I do not know anything if I cry.
Slowly they could see their way. (17)

The passage presumably narrates the situation before the father’s disappearance, when the sons worked in his garden while he “owned and owned and lived alone.” Then there comes a vignette of the “eldest brother,” Alexander, in his working clothes and waving a watering can, as if flaunting the insignia of his father’s trade in a gesture which could mean his taking over of the father’s domain by force. He is accompanied by someone who “came,” possibly the estranged father himself, and a strange stout man who is in between them, and at whose sight the other brothers bow and escape. “Between” could also signify the division between the father and the sons, and the ambivalence is made possible by the typical Steinian indeterminacy and fluidity of pronouns, here present in the clause “and he was in between,” where “he” could refer to Alexander, his father, or the mysterious “stout man.” The situation in the family is described through reference to weak eyes (“a cataract”) or lack of sight (“nobody saw anybody cry”). The moment of the brothers’ confrontation with the father and the stout man, as implied in the text, is combined with their loss of sight which they eventually “slowly” recover (though “see” in the last sentence of the quote has also a metaphorical meaning). Literally, the mysterious male figure could be associated with the agent of the father’s disappearance, or metaphorically, with the brothers’ sense of guilt and their fear of punishment (by castration) for their disobedience toward or mistreatment of the father.

In Freud’s lengthy discussion of the story of the Sand-Man from Hoffman’s Nachstueck, this fabulous creature comes at night to punish naughty children by taking away their eyes, and as Freud explains:

The study of dreams, fantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, is quite often a substitute for the fear of castration. When the mythical criminal Oedipus blinds himself, this is merely a mitigated form of the penalty of castration, the only one that befits him according to the lex talionis…. These and many other features of the tale appear arbitrary and meaningless if one rejects the relation between fear for the eyes and fear of castration, but they become meaningful as soon as the Sand-Man is replaced by the dreaded father, at whose hands castration is expected. (139-140)
In the ensuing argument, Freud explicitly connects the emergence of the sense of the uncanny to the dread over castration, foregrounding this kind of anxiety as one of the possible main sources of the aesthetic effect of the “unheimlich.” Stein’s indeterminate and inconclusive references to the drama of the horticulturist’s family, and in fact, her entire account of all the “crimes” in her novel, seem to be especially intent on evoking the sense of the uncanny as experienced by both the writer and the reader, the more so as the mysteries she hints at rather than narrates remain forever unresolved. However, in her case, as in that of any female reader, the classic psychoanalytical interpretation of the uncanny as it reveals itself in Stein’s novel can hardly be seen as convincing: instead, what appears to prevail in her text is an insistence on a strange combination of the cosy, familiar and homely with an implication of unexpected brutality and violence erupting in the very midst of the warm and secure middle-class interior. What is characteristic of Stein’s version of the strange occurrences of the summer of 1933 is that they are all connected with countryside households, both “country houses” and “houses in the country” according to her introductory differentiation, the “homes” that for some strange reasons turn out to be the most “unhomely” places, haunted by some never revealed dark family secrets. In the case of Alexander’s family we are further told that “The eldest felt that he could not be a priest [as his brothers would wish him to be, probably to get rid of his overbearing presence] no not as long as his father was alive and his father did not die nor did they, not even a cousin died, but they got rid of the father just the same…. It was not a crime but a crime is in time” (17). The last sentence might suggest the outsiders’ reflections and judgment as to what might have happened to the father of the family, and their subsequent identification of his odd disappearance, and thus disowning, with a criminal act.

The other strange events in Bilignin that found their way to the novel include the violent death of an Englishwoman who was the companion of a wealthy elderly lady living in the neighborhood: she was found dead in the garden with a bullet in her head. This death is discussed at length in Everybody’s Autobiography, while in the novel Stein only alludes to it, passing on to unclear stories of a group of young women, all married but unfaithful to their husbands, one of their presumed lovers being the horticulturist’s son, Alexander. The motif of infidelity, deception and victimization seems to surface throughout the whole text, leading the narrator to a number of remarks on the specificity of “crime” in the countryside, perceived as different, more momentous and noticeable than criminal acts in the city, but also, oddly, more easy to hide and ignore. Just as in her conceptualization of America in her first Narration lecture (in contradistinction from England) as a self-contained, autonomous continent, free from England’s imperial burden (Parry 45), Stein seems to perceive the countryside as separate, self-enclosed and radically isolated from the city, and this difference is paradoxical:
They said nothing happens in the country but there are more changes in a family in the country in five years than in a family in a city and this is natural. If nothing changed in the country there could not be butter and eggs. There have to be changes in the country, there had to be breaking up of families and killing of dogs and spoiling of sons and losing of daughters and killing of mothers and banishing of fathers. Of course there must be in the country. Nothing happens in the city. Everything happens in the country. The city just tells what has happened in the country, it has already happened in the country.

Lizzie do you understand. (42-43)

The passage seems to comment not only on the changes brought about by modernity, but on the inherent inevitability of changes in the country at any time, the changes being necessary to enable the production – in sufficient quantity for the market – of “butter and eggs.” However, in the rural environment, as Stein seems to argue, these very necessary transformations cause much more damage, especially in the family, which often leads to grim consequences that the narrator duly enumerates. The crimes committed in the country appear to be more horrifying and prior to whatever terrible happens in the city: “The city just tells what has happened in the country, it has already happened in the country” (43).

The passage ends with one of the characteristic, repeated exhortations to a mysterious “Lizzie.” While some critics argue that this proper name is but an intended distortion of the word “listen” (Gygax 94, note 16, 98) which serves as a means of buttonholing the reader and keeping his attention in an implied emotional dialogue that characterizes the whole novel, the editor of the second (1982) and third (2008) publications of Blood, John Herbert Gill, claims in his “Afterword” (1982 and 2008) and “Introduction” (2008) that Stein engages here her memory of the famous 1892 murder case involving the murder of the father and stepmother of Lizbeth Borden, in River Fall, Massachusetts. Lizzie Borden, the heroine of countless popular reports of the murder was the defendant in the case, eventually released for lack of conclusive evidence. This famous unresolved murder story seems to have especially fascinated Stein as an example of a never-explained countryside crime that transfixed the imagination of the mostly urban audience and for long held the attention of the contemporary mass media. Borden was said to have killed her father and stepmother with an axe due to a quarrel over inheritance, as the rich father presumably intended to leave most of his property to the children of his second wife. It was probably the stuffy and stultifying atmosphere of unreleased passions in a hermetic middle-class family and household that could have interested Stein, inducing her to choose Lizzie Borden for her first reader/listener, as someone who could have perfectly understood the
The creeping horror of the “inside” family life of the French countryside where “The more you see the country the more you do not wonder why they shut the door” (38).

The inevitable changes in the traditionally enclosed and conservative countryside are referred to in Stein’s novel as conducive to killing, banishing, spoiling, losing, breaking up, i.e. acts of crime whose causes remain invisible to outsiders, and whose consequences, as in the case of the hotel keeper’s wife, are quickly swept away and covered up so as not to frighten the guests in the hotel: “nobody who just went and ate and slept at the hotel could know that anything had happened. It was wonderful the way they covered it up and went on” (18), as the narrator muses not without a touch of irony. The appearance of permanence, tradition, and undisturbed continuity seems to serve well the easiness with which the countryside people get over the unexplained, mysterious events taking place around them: “The father was safely away, the mother with the wig did not stay, that is she went another way, and there they were in the garden all getting richer and richer” (20). Indeed, “when there is a background for a crime, there is no crime” (28).

At the same time, the inroads of modernity, making rural changes more profound and violent, took their toll in Stein’s countryside as well, emblematized in the novel by the hotel and its guests. The hotel as the site of transit, transience, mobility and desire is often mentioned in modern texts or texts on modernism, together with railway or bus depots, subways and city streets, as “physical sites of mobility” that escape institutional control and management: instead of promoting social order and harmony, as Lewis Mumford observes, “The principal effect of the gridiron plan… of the American city… is that every street becomes a thoroughfare” in which “the tendency towards movement… vastly overweighs the tendency toward settlement” (quoted in Trask 18). Modern public transport systems become equaled with disorder, unsettling freedom from traditional norms and conventions, and thus with social anarchy that begins to spread from the urban landscape toward the apparently pastoral surroundings, tainting the visibly idyllic countryside with the same modern desire for instant, anonymous, and unsanctioned gratification. In this context, social mobility becomes not only a necessity but creates a desired occasion for transgressing traditional boundaries of class and decorum: “the whole notion of social placement becomes compromised by the ease with which modern culture allows persons to move in and out of spaces” (Trask 19).

Stein’s hotel in Blood is exactly this kind of place and an opportunity to transgress at the same time, which is communicated in the typically indirect and confusing fashion:

As I was saying meadows and grass are often dry in summer and if they are country houses, hotels are inhabited. In which case changes and pleasures are incessant but which makes it a pleasure to dearly love.
The three who are married are as much married as ever and they miss themselves and their husbands quite as much as if for instance they do not like what they feel to be alike it is of course of no importance that their advantage is not easily taken. (51-52)

The countryside hotel appears a deceptive and ambivalent surrounding: the three married women succumb to temptation, and even if reluctantly, they take advantage of the opportunity to betray, while being betrayed themselves. The hotel keeper lives in his hotel with his wife, but it is also the place where he is unfaithful to her. The hotel is a place of betrayal of husbands and wives alike, offering people an occasion to abandon conventional loyalties and succumb to unsanctioned, forbidden pleasures. In the hotel, the constraints of the “inside” regulations of private life felt as oppressive undergo relaxation, which enables the constrained individuals to experience sudden exaltation and sense of freedom, at the same time forcing them to deceive and lie to themselves and to others. Yet the illusory sense of liberation prevails, as in the hotel keeper’s reaction after his wife’s tragic death: “He had to go out, he had not gone out because he had never done any other thing than stay in. And now he had to go out. Think of it not only he but he had to go out and sometimes even to be out. Out is not out. Some in that place can always be coming in and going out from staying in, but he not at all not at all not at all” (68-69). The freedom of modern travelers associated with uninhibited “coming in” and “going out” of the hotel resembles the conditions of living in the city where superficial and anonymous contacts with strangers overturn any sense of stability in human relations, and in the country, additionally, it dissolves the permanence of traditional and well-established boundaries that had hitherto regulated the apparently peaceful country life. Now the hidden crime characteristic of the countryside, due to the presence of the city-like hotel in its midst, becomes more open to public view, as in the case of the death of Mme Pernollet, and thus appears more disturbing and destructive to the sense of security of the country dwellers. However, in Stein’s representation of this phenomenon, the decisive factor in the new circumstances is the unregulated proximity of the mobile work force epitomized in the figures of the ever changing domestic servants.

As Trask contends in his book on the modern conflation of discourses on social mobility and subversive sexual desires, the persistent modern exposure to the attenuation of traditional class divisions under the impact of urbanization, industrialization and implementations of new technologies brought uncertainty and fears about the future that were distinctly pronounced in sociological and, less directly, literary texts of the era (1-14). In this connection, it might be useful to attend to the motif of changing servants in Stein’s novel, and the pervading sound of anxiety, if not alarm, in its numerous passages dealing with their threatening, and yet necessary if not desired presence. Stein opens the novel
with a lengthy description of several pairs of servants (there is always a woman and a man) that came and were sent away from the household she and Toklas kept in Bilignin. In *Everybody’s Autobiography* she provides more details about this disquieting turnover that culminates in a series of mysterious, frightening events; nevertheless, the jumpy syntax and the fragmentary sequence of broken sentences in *Blood* is more evocative of the overall atmosphere of unnamed threat that permeates Stein’s memories as rendered in her text. Stein’s account of the changing succession of domestics is full of details about their idiosyncratic behavior and odd habits, but she rarely gives exact reasons why the servants have had to be finally dismissed. The first pair, who were Italian, had their “queer way of walking,” and he was no good keeping a fire in the stove; the next pair had problems with health and were psychologically unstable, the third pair had a child and wished to sleep under a tree, which caused a scandal and thus they had to be fired. All of them were found wanting, even if for hardly rational reasons.

However, it is the last pair of servants that causes the greatest apprehension and anxiety. This last pair are said to be immigrants, and the narrator comments on this as follows: “That is immigrants exist no longer because no nation accepts them. These however had been immigrants years ago when everybody wanted them. This is a pity” (4). Clearly, Stein’s narrator does not consider herself an immigrant writing in English in the French countryside: immigration means for her more a class than national distinction, while the prior desirability of immigrants and their later expulsion had all to do with their serving as cheap labor, now made expedient. Again, the strange habits of this pair are duly recorded: “she was wonderful with horses and he loved automobiles only he would never take a job where he would have to lie down under an automobile with his legs sticking out” (4-5). *Everybody’s Autobiography* specifies the nationality of the woman servant as Polish and the name of her husband as Jean. Both *Everybody’s Autobiography* and *Blood* record the strange occurrences that follow the arrival of this pair: there is a disturbing train of visitors at Stein’s and Toklas’s country house and in the meantime the hosts’ and the guests’ cars are discovered to have been tampered with, and the telephone is found disconnected. When the garage mechanics come to repair the cars they advise Stein to get rid of the servants who cannot well explain their actions during the whole incident. *Everybody’s Autobiography* records the Polish servant’s awkward explanation: “The Polish woman was there and I said well and she said yes and she said Jean is always like that when anything like that can happen. What I said. Blood on the dining room floor she said” (63). The last sentence, which has been eventually turned into the title of the novel, seems to provoke the most acute turmoil due to its apparent disconnectedness from anything that appeared meaningful to Stein in her attempts to interpret the situation. The idea that the servant could have tried to rationally refer to an
aspect of the same reality escapes the narrator: the servant’s world is not Stein’s world because they cannot well communicate even when using the same language.

Interestingly, even if the incriminated couple are immediately dismissed, the state of confusion persists – Stein and Toklas are to attend the funeral of the hotel keeper’s wife and they feel excited and shaken, which is underscored by sudden and unexpected emotional addresses to the reader: “Oh dear. We all cried. When we heard she was dead” (7); “Listen to this one” (8); “Do you really understand” (9); “Think of all that. Just think of all that” (9); “She tried to be while she cried. Oh dear yes” (12); “What did you say. Yes they had somebody employed there who certainly did her share” (12-13). For the time being the servants are not mentioned, though it seems that the reasons for dismissing the couple amount to their behavior being interpreted as odd and their poor linguistic ability to communicate with their employers identified with their culpability. Yet later the narrator obsessively returns to the figures of the servants as unexplainable and ominous, almost wishing for them to have some connection to the hotel perceived as the scene of crime, as if to justify her hardly contained feeling of unspecified menace and danger.

[There were one two three four five and now six couples who succeeded one another and anybody would know that something had happened but nothing had, not if anything had…

Of course that made it at no time that they had at any time they had at no time, any connection with a hotel.

The matter is that they are accused but nobody mentions it. (61)

So they change none of them have gone none of them are at, a hotel. And why not, because there is no need of them there besides they had not thought of it. If they had it would have been a coincidence, and because this is so, oh yes, oh yes, oh yes I know, because oh yes I know this is so. (62-63)

In the passage above the narrator seems to almost hysterically insist on her knowledge, or intuition, of the servants’ guilt though her panic confirms the suspicion (her own as well as ours) that there are no grounds whatsoever to accuse the servants of any wrongdoing, not to mention crime. They are simply aliens who enter one’s house to live there like close relations while having no traditional right to stay “inside” as, in fact, ultimate outsiders: “he comes to answer an advertisement and you never saw him before and there you live in the house with him” (“What Does She See…” 64).

While Nadel stresses in his essay the similarities in Stein’s and James’s aesthetics, such as preoccupation with language conveyed through “the atmosphere of the unasked question,” fascination with the theatre, opera, and ballet, the parallel between Stein’s
concept of the continuous present and James’s moment or centre of consciousness (84-88), it is equally important to observe the striking affinity of their expatriate experience (which Nadel also mentions in passing) and their ensuing perception of class difference as uncanny and threatening. In Blood, the narrator’s anxiety at the thought of the servants’ ominous presence brings to mind another story of the uncanny seated right at the heart of the country hearth and home, in which servants play the role of horrifying ghosts: James’s The Turn of the Screw. In this novella, the dead servants reveal themselves only to the governess, a half-servant herself in whose case class inferiority proves to function as an insurmountable barrier to sexual fulfillment. The servants’ unacceptability in the eyes of their employer, the governess and other servants (Mrs Grose) consisted in the scandal of their sexual mismatch that had dared to transgress rigid class boundaries: Quint was a gardener and valet, Miss Jessel was educated and, by implication, of lower middle class origin, a combination that in the governess’s mind might have vaguely reflected her own situation vis-à-vis her gentleman employer, and at the same time legitimized Quint and Jessel’s otherworldly existence and explained their corruption of innocent children. In Stein’s novel, the sexual aspect of the servants’ presence is less pronounced, nevertheless it attracts the narrator’s attention as marked in her meticulous recording of their coming and going in symmetrical heterosexual pairs (always as a man and a woman), at least on one occasion accompanied by a child, which might have in itself constituted an oddity from the homosexual writer’s point of view. The sexual difference was here combined with and complicated by the sense of social and cultural otherness, all of them located right at the heart of Stein and Toklas’s warm and cozy but unconventional household in the French countryside, a difference within difference within another difference, becoming a source of ceaseless apprehension, anxiety, and suspicion.

The servants’ uncanny otherness, that at times seems to almost undermine the speaker’s belief in their humanity, is thus mainly that of culture, class, and sexuality and it is these social categories that loom in Stein’s texts as ideally rigid, impermeable, and immune to any inroads from outside, but in reality constantly infringed upon by “citified” modernity. Thus, it is the figure of an undecipherable and alien servant that appears to invade and then haunt the confines of the enclosed Steinian household, the “unheimlich” within the “heimlich,” to be exorcised only by the vigilant observation of exotic habit and the right to expel the undesirable alien. It is their social and cultural difference that amounts to the most strongly felt mystery and an ultimately unnamed crime perpetrated in the background of Stein’s detective fiction, the crime whose scandal and horror, as the narrator well realizes, are to stay with her: “No one is amiss after servants are changed. Are they. Finis.” The last word, latinate and ornamental, following a question without
a question mark that sounds like a grim foreboding, amounts here to no more than wishful thinking, never to be fulfilled since both the writer and her readers know that the conventional beginnings and endings which constitute the traditional plot of the genre, as she defines it in her third Narration lecture, are forever suspended, if not cancelled, by Stein’s indeterminacy of meaning, lack of any finality, combined with the fundamental nontransparent nature of the world posited in her text. “Finis” means an arbitrary boundary set up to forestall the flow of mysteries which her “story” allows in, like a door to a haunted house serving as a kind of artificial barrier and demarcation line that could as well function as a new threshold or a new beginning, and thus an invitation to a view on yet another “crime” spotted against the background of reality rendered as an incessant flux of words. As in her other works, the textual and the social, the “inside” and the “outside” in Stein’a detective fiction are not so much opposed to each other as rather form an unbroken continuum; in the same manner in which Freudian “heimlich” and “unheimlich” are in fact inseparable from each other, so are Stein’s “crimes” and their cultural background, her avant-garde text and the historical reality in which it is brought to being.

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Michael Gold could not have imagined a more appropriate time to publish his fictionalized memoir *Jews Without Money*. Coming out in March 1930, as the first signs of what would develop into the Great Depression became visible, the book enjoyed a huge popularity for its depiction of the miserable life led by Jewish immigrants in New York’s Lower East Side, and went through eleven printings by October (Folsom 15). In the long run, however, *Jews Without Money* was forgotten, and even during the post-war ethnic revival it received scant attention. One of the reasons behind this neglect can be ascribed to Gold’s political commitment. Until his death in 1967 he remained a staunch critic of capitalism and from his column in *The Daily Worker* he targeted the most pressing political issues. Moreover, his compliance with the Russian Communist Party agenda during the 1930s got him many “enemies” in the American cultural establishment. The academia has remained almost indifferent to the book: only among the historians of the Jewish immigration there has been a mild interest in it as a documentary source.

Marcus Klein’s *Foreigners* is one of the few exceptions. Reconstructing the cultural milieu of New York’s Greenwich Village and following the vicissitudes of radical publications like *Masses*, *Liberator* and *New Masses*, Klein shed new light on Gold as a leading figure of the inter-war cultural revolution.¹ Moreover, he claimed a crucial role for ethnic writers in the shaping of American modernism. By now, the role of ethnicity in the understanding of modernism has been affirmed, even though traditional readings centered on contributions by the expatriates still prevail.

*Jews Without Money*, however, demonstrates that alternative approaches to modernity were in existence alongside the activity of intellectuals living in London and Paris. New York, with its futuristic architecture, multicultural and multilingual population, diversification of spaces into business districts, immigrant ghettos and leisure areas, imposed a fragmented perception of the urban experience. Gold, from the vantage point of his immigrant background, could grasp the multiple layers of the metropolitan texture more

¹ Klein’s analysis of *Jews Without Money*, though, fails to acknowledge Gold’s experimentalist approach to narrative form.
distinctly than other intellectuals, and his Marxist training helped him understand its state as a consequence of the advent of capitalism. In his book, then, Gold tries to make sense of both the fragmentation of the urban experience and the exploitation of immigrant labor, establishing a middle-ground between art and politics: the descriptions of squalid conditions of the Jewish working-class avoid melodramatic sensationalism and blend with the style and imagery inspired by the literary experimentalism of the 1920s. In this way, his work well documents how ethnic modernism originates from the immigrant writer’s need to aggregate all the scattered pieces of the self and the community after their mass dislocation in the late nineteenth-century. Modernism thus appears to function as a strategy of survival, a desperate attempt to keep together both the self and the community as (fragmented) wholes.

I. In Search of Form

It took more than a decade for Gold to achieve his precarious middle-ground. The author, who was yet to assume the pseudonym by which he became famous,\(^2\) came up with the idea of writing a book about his childhood in the Lower East Side as early as 1917, when in the November issue of the radical periodical *Masses* he published “Birth.” The sketch had a subtitle, “A Prologue to a Tentative East-Side Novel,” which revealed the lack of any definitive plan about the final outcome of his project, still in need of direction. Gold was looking for a suitable form to fictionalize the ghetto. “Birth” begins thus:

I was born (so my mother once told me), on a certain dim day of April, about seven in a morning wrapped in fog. The streets of the East Side were dark with grey, wet gloom; the boats of the harbor cried constantly, like great bewildered gulls, like deep, booming voices of calamity. The day was somber and heavy and unavoidable, like the walls of a prison about the city. And in the same hour and the same tenement that bore me, Rosie Hyman the prostitute died, and the pale ear of the same doctor heard my first wails and the last quiverings of her sore heart. (44)

The paragraph exploits traditional narrative techniques; like a staple nineteenth-century novel, the opening lines mark a point of origin and identify the narrator/protagonist as creator of the emotional and visual landscape. The omniscient narrator imposes his vi-

\(^2\) Michael Gold was born Itzok Isaac Granich. His first works, “Birth” included, were published under the name Irwin Granich.
sion, providing the reader with the metaphors by which the setting should be interpreted and underlining the link between life and death by associating the narrator’s birth and a prostitute’s death. Eleven years later, the beginning of Jews Without Money makes quite a different impression:

I can never forget the East Side where I lived as a boy.
It was a block from the notorious Bowery, a tenement canyon hung with fire-escapes, bed-clothing, and faces.
Always these faces at the tenement windows. The street never failed them. It was an immense excitement. It never slept. It roared like a sea. It exploded like fireworks.
People pushed and wrangled in the street. There were armies of howling pushcart peddlers. Women screamed, dogs barked and copulated. Babies cried.
A parrot cursed. Ragged kids played under truck-horses. Fat housewives fought from stoop to stoop. A beggar sang. (13)

Both quotations present the East Side as a wretched neighborhood, and the author is mainly concerned with its misery and overcrowding. But whereas the first draft expresses all this through the prison metaphor and the use of dark colors, in the final version Gold shifts his focus onto the sounds and the physical presence of people. Furthermore, the short coordinate sentences that replace the meditative phrasing of “Birth” pile up a succession of images that overlap and create a comprehensive picture of an East Side block. The street is put at the center of the stage, the exterior prevails over the individual and no filter is interpolated between text and reader.

The stylistic evolution of Gold’s writing, along with an evocative imagery and the presentation of city life through a kaleidoscope of scenes, comes from his decade-long literary apprenticeship as both critic and writer. His first meditations on art, published some years after “Birth,” reveal a degree of naiveté and lack a clearly defined poetics. “Towards Proletarian Art,” the manifesto that appeared in the Liberator in March 1921, calls for an artistic renewal led by the masses, who will impose new contents and new styles on literature. Faced with the necessity to balance the personal recollections of his tough childhood in the ghetto and the messianic invocations of a more equal social order, Gold singles out the tenement as a metaphor suggesting a new artistic principle. The writer declares that the tenement is “the pattern in which my being has been cast” (“Towards” 64), providing the filter through which the outside world is seen and understood.

But what is a tenement? In his article, Gold writes about weeping mothers, sick workers and dirty children, and this thematic aspect provides the very nourishment for his artistic vision. The tenement, however, is more than that: it is not just a “content,” but

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a style. The tenement is a “theatre” where the dwellers involuntarily stage “shows” for one another, causing a confusion which the traditional single points of view cannot decipher. The narrow and mostly dark spaces compel the people to project parts of their lives outside onto stoops, fire-escapes, roofs and street-corners, establishing a continuity between exteriors and interiors that challenged the Victorian notions of domesticity. In short, to put the tenement into fiction requires a new way of writing fiction.

What in “Towards Proletarian Art” was no more than an intuition achieves a clearer shape in the following years, when a flourish of experiments in literature, ranging from Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer* to the works of the Paris expatriate colony, provided Gold with a new literary language and helped him understand what stylistic direction he should follow. In “Hemingway – White Collar Poet,” a review published in 1928, Gold criticizes the author of *The Sun Also Rises* for adhering to escapist literature but, at the same time, praises his “bare, hard style of a god-like reporter,” providing the ground for a narrative that is “precise and perfect as science” (100). In his later writing, Gold would go so far as to acknowledge that “Hemingway and others have had the intuition to incorporate [a] proletarian element into their work,” the scorn for any “vague fumbling poetry” (“Proletarian Realism” 206). In the article, written in the mood of confidence following the publication of *Jews Without Money*, Gold outlines ten rules for writing what he calls “proletarian realism,” among which there is the recommendation to use “as few words as possible,” to avoid “straining or melodrama or other effects,” and to attempt to create “cinema in words,” concentrating on “swift action, clear form” and the “direct line” (“Proletarian” 207-208).

Avoiding melodrama when confronting a neighborhood where deaths, alcoholism and sickness were daily features was not an easy task. Gold, however, follows Hemingway’s rule of evoking emotion through the employment of mere facts. The episode in which the reaction to the death of Esther, the narrator’s sister, is described is a perfect example of this technique. The situation of death could have occasioned an overflow of sentimentality, but Gold avoids such an effect by first providing a visual representation focused on the mother, seen in her stillness and changed attitude after the great loss, and then contrasting her silence with the usual vitality that was peculiar to her. The bare fact of Esther’s death asks for no further comment:

Esther was dead. My mother had borne everything in life, but this she could not bear. It frightened one to see how quiet she became. She was no longer active, cheerful, quarrelsome. She sat by the window all day, and read her prayer-book. As she mumbled the endless Hebrew prayers, tears flowed silently down her face. She did not speak, but she knew why she was crying. Esther was dead. (288)
Throughout the book, Gold appears to be quite in control of his narrative material; the episodes are dramatized through sentences that relate facts and avoid interpretations, thus communicating particular states of mind without any direct reference to them. Another example can be found in the following passage about the narrator’s discovery of sex:

...Then they went to her room.
Nigger and I followed them. It was on the ground floor of my tenement. Stealthy as detectives, we stared through the keyhole. What I saw made my heart beat, my face redden with shock.
Nigger snickered. He saw I was hurt and it amused him. (25)

The ensuing row between Nigger and young Mickey discloses the latter’s psychological drama occasioned by a discovery he was not yet equipped to deal with. This key episode, testifying to the vulnerability of immigrant children to the crude aspects of life, does not give rein to the explicit condemnation of living conditions. Emotions are restrained, but the repeated references to crime and prostitution in the following chapters help to envision the grimness of a childhood spent in the ghetto.

II. The Ghetto as Theatre

The Lower East Side was not just a site of vice and sordidness. The immigrant communities transformed this section of the city into a cultural laboratory and the street became the incubator of new forms of art. This street culture, that reshaped the urban setting into a multitude of theatrical stages, is central in Jews Without Money. The East Side is “an endless pageant” (13), a “free enormous circus” where “there was always something for boys to see” (38); the coming of an organ grinder, for example, stirs up children who, gathering into a dance, catch the attention of passers-by. People stop their activities and become the audience:

But the dancers make every one else happy—some of the prostitutes have left their ‘business’ for a moment, and watch with gentle smiles. The cop leans against a lamp-post and smiles. A grim old graybeard with a live chicken under his arm is smiling at the children. A truckdriver has slowed down and watches them dreamily as he rattles by. Mothers watch from the tenement windows. A fat important little business Jew, bursting like a plum with heat, mops his face, and admires the children. (51)

3 There are few exceptions, like the episode that describes an unjust punishment at school (36-37).
This description, highlighting the social variety of the audience, testifies to the author’s intention of using theatre as a trope to convey the complexity of the ghetto life.

Even attending a synagogue service is perceived in performative terms: “The synagogue… was like a theater. The Rabbi blew a ram’s horn, and a hundred bearded men wrapped in shrouds convulsed themselves in agony. They groaned, sobbed, beat their breasts and wailed those strange Oriental melodies…” (185). Since his visit to Russia in 1925, where he sojourned for almost a year, Gold became an enthusiast of constructivist theatre. He was particularly impressed by Meierchold’s attempt to bring “the street onto the stage” and his ability to reproduce the rhythms and dynamics of the modern city life (Tuerk 7-9). Back in America, Gold tried to follow the Russian director’s example in a new play, *Hoboken Blues*. The stage directions for Act III, depicting the life in Harlem, reflect Gold’s preoccupation with a scenography which blends big advertising signs and futuristic architecture, and which requires the reproduction of city music, a mixture of “horns, gongs, sirens, whistles, bells, flat wheels” (Tuerk 9). It is not difficult to see the correspondence between this experiment and the emphasis on the sounds in first paragraphs in *Jews Without Money*; placed at the very beginning of the narrative, the “musical overture” works as a soundtrack that must be kept in mind throughout the reading of the book.

Another cue Gold derived from watching productions by Meierchold was the division of the stage into a number of spaces where different actions were performed simultaneously, thus presenting the plurality and complexity of working-class neighborhoods. The juxtaposition of scenes without chronological concatenation, allowing for the inclusion of all possible perspectives through which a space becomes textualized, had been already successfully attempted in fiction by writers like Sherwood Anderson (*Wineburg, Ohio*) and John Dos Passos (*Manhattan Transfer*); Gold followed their example and adopted what might be called a cubist narrative strategy. This choice, though, is not just a matter of form, but responds to an inner necessity of the dislocated immigrant, who, as Henry Roth once put it, saw his own life as something made “out of rags and patches… a crazy quilt” (211): the scenes described in *Jews Without Money*, thus, are to be understood as pieces that make up a fragmented picture of the immigrants, suspended between worlds and confronting a pluralistic and heterogeneous environment. The relics of the European past, whether people or their stories, constitute the narrator’s identity as much as the sounds of streetcars, the towering buildings and the products of popular culture, all signifying the metropolitan experience. Thus, the subdivision of the narrative material into autonomous scenes, each describing a particular character, situation or place, on the one hand reflects the complex and multi-faceted ghetto life, and on the other illustrates the process of self-reinvention by which the narrator can claim all the “rags and patches” that make up his quilt-like identity.
Mickey, the narrator/spectator, finds himself caught in a kaleidoscope of images and perceptions, and any attempt at imposing a single vision or interpretation on the surrounding environment is bound to fail. The diverse and contrasting images and experiences generate a confusion that reproduces the situation of a child whose intellectual faculties are yet to develop. Only gradually does the contemplation of human suffering and exploitation emerge as a consequence of the dominant capitalist order, until the final invocation of the “workers’ Revolution” (309) discloses the author’s political vision.

III. A Landscape of War, Junk and Decay

While Gold’s withdrawn narrator avoids imposing any view and meaning of the events, the recurring images define the prevailing metaphors that shape the perception of the ghetto experience. Concerned mostly with the misery of the immigrants’ lives, the author puts emphasis on three emblems of urban existence: ruin, waste and violence. Evidently, Gold reassesses the enthusiasm with which the astounding economic expansion of the 1920s was greeted. The Lower East Side “was a world of violence and stone” (Jews 63) and throughout the book it is seen as a territory to be conquered, which reflects the immigrant struggle to carve out an own place. When Mickey crosses the Bowery, new exotic worlds appear to him: a pig’s head in a butcher’s window, the “strange green vegetables” and “men eating oysters” fascinate the young explorer in Little Italy, but he is soon singled out as a Jew, and the boys of the neighborhood beat him with sticks (187). The fights between gangs of children epitomize the struggle of immigrants to take root in a territory, a vital space that has to be controlled and defended against forces from outside, as in the episode about the battle for the possession of a vacant lot used as playground (45-48).

As the only available, although temporary, open-air recreation area, the Delancey street vacant lot has a quite un-edenic outlook, being “home of all the twisted junk, rusty baby carriages, lumber, bottles, boxes, moldy pants and dead cats of the neighborhood” (46). Junk and garbage are a constant feature of Gold’s Lower East Side, and their signi-

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* What contemporary critic Kenneth Burke wrote in defense of Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep* in a letter to *New Masses* seems also appropriate for *Jews Without Money*: Burke declared that Roth “caught the ‘pre-political’ thinking of childhood”, and the great merit of his book lies in the “fluent and civilized way in which he found, on our city streets, the new equivalents of an ancient jungle” (quoted in Denning 236).

* Although some scholars consider the final invocation as too sudden and ungrounded, a gradual development of the narrator’s political awareness can effectively be traced. Politics comes suddenly into the book when Dr. Solow mentions the union as a possible cure to the illness that affects the narrator’s father (233). Then, it is Aunt Lena’s involvement in a strike that originates political debates in the family (235-237). Finally, in chapter 18, the narrator show awareness of the connections between capital and immigrants’ living conditions (241).
Significance goes beyond a simplistic indictment of the unhealthy conditions in the neighborhood to signal the deterioration of the American myth as promise. Discarded objects, the polluted waters of the East River, the stench emanating from garbage cans and tiny alleys used as dumps are tokens of a city in ruin, where life has withered under the pressure of economic expansion:

New York is a devil’s dream…. It is all geometry angles and stone. It is mythical, a city buried by a volcano. No grass is found in this petrified city… Just stone. It is the ruins of Pompeii…(40)

Transforming the New York cityscape – unquestionably the very image of modernity – into an archaeological phantasy has much to do with challenging the great American narrative of development and progress.\(^6\) Gold’s representation of New York contrasts with the imperial vision that characterizes late nineteenth-century culture, when a public discourse modeled on classical ideals of order and symmetry, that found expression in a number of architectural projects, was considered the solution to threats of social fragmentation (Trachtenberg, Rutkoff).

The repeated reference to junk – the archeological artifacts of a consumer society where objects quickly lose their functions – puts alongside the official public discourse of economic prosperity those elements excluded from it, establishing an identification between immigrants and useless, undesirable objects (Celati). A further reference to historical past reinforces the role of waste as sole bearer of the immigrant’s instances: some seventeenth-century gravestones that pave a tenement’s backyard, one of the few places where the ghetto children can play, refer to an epoch that is alien to their experience. Looking at them, the narrator cannot find any cathartic continuity between the traditional past and his own present (Denning 248). The discarded objects that he recognizes are just those that fill garbage bins and empty lots.

The overall picture of the city is that of a lifeless place, taking a heavy toll on its inhabitants. Nigger’s father, a tailor by trade, is likened to a mummy, as his face resembles “a skull with sharp cheek bones and nose from which the flesh had rotted” (263), while another character, Aunt Lena, hardened by sweatshop labor, has lost the “rosy peasant cheeks” and “shiny black hair” (131), which people admired when she arrived from Europe: her “skin was yellowish with bad health, coarsened and tight over the cheek bones” (236). The immigrants inhabit a dystopian urban space, and when the winter and the economic panic coincide, they transform the ghetto into a scene of apocalyptic disaster:

\(^6\) See Benjamin: “with the destabilization of market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled” (13).
There was a panic on Wall Street. Multitudes were without work; there were strikes, suicides, and food riots. The prostitutes roamed our street like wolves…Life froze. The sun vanished from the deathly gray sky…. There were hundreds of evictions…Other dogs and cats were frozen. Men and women, too, were found dead in hallways and on docks. (241-242)

IV. An Ethnic Route to Modernism

The vision of the modern metropolis as an “unreal city” recalls T. S. Eliot’s depiction of London in *The Waste Land*, even though it could be hardly possible to think of a more distant pair of writers. Gold’s modernism, although sharing imagery and style with the literary circles in Europe, has a peculiar genealogy. The modernist school, which originated in the New York radical circles, developed through the contribution of intellectuals, coming from different backgrounds and united by the challenge to represent the city’s social and ethnic multiplicity in novels, paintings and music. Theirs was a completely different approach from the academism of the London and Paris circles, where tradition was held as the unifying element against the fragmentation of modernity. This “transatlantic” divarication, although regrettably underestimated, is important in order to appreciate how modernism itself was a fragmented cultural experience, and illustrates the plurality and heterogeneity of responses to the challenges of the new era. This divarication hints at a basic contradiction that has marked the intellectual response to modernity from its beginnings: as a number of artists reacted to urbanism and industrialization with a sense of horror and estrangement, others fed upon “the real trouble in the modern streets, and transformed their noise and dissonance into beauty and truth” (Berman 31). In most countries modernism was “a compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative” (Bradbury 46), and in the context of Anglo-American letters these contrasting attitudes depend much on the thousands miles that separated Europe from the United States. In New York a peculiar combination of bohemia and radicalism made the Greenwich Village a unique laboratory where art seemed to contain “two types of revolt, the individual and the social” (Cowley 66). It was the product of two overlapping geographies: a web of intellectual circles, magazines (from the *Masses* to the *Broom*), galleries (Stieglitz’s 291) and theatre companies (The Provincetown Players) thrived alongside the sweatshops where Italian and Jewish workers earned their daily bread and fought for better conditions. The immigrants,

7 The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, notorious for the fire that killed more than a hundred female immigrant workers in March 1911, was located on Washington Square.
then, played a key role in bringing political issues to the fore, and in the case of the “Paterson Pageant,” staged in 1913 at the Madison Square Garden, art not just represented their struggles, but articulated them.

As he came of age and crossed Broadway to settle in the Village, Gold found a cultural milieu where his past life in the Lower East Side could be infused with new political meaning and find literary expression. He absorbed a view of the artist’s quest as revolution, against both cultural tradition and society, and of intellectual work as a step toward the creation of a new order. The ramification of Anglo-American modernism, thus, depends on a difference in political attitudes as much as the socialism professed by many New York-based artists was completely antithetic to, say, Eliot’s staunch belief in the forces of tradition, church and monarchy. Moreover, the presence of immigrant communities and intellectuals in the American metropolis represented a powerful agency of radicalization. It is true that ethnic literature, although showing a “remarkable concern for the American world of modernity” (Sollors 406), for the most part clung to traditional styles. All the same, a convergence between the immigrant experience and modernism took place, as some writers of different backgrounds like Toomer, Roth, Di Donato and Gold ventured into the territories of the avant-garde to find a vocabulary and a stylistic repertoire suitable for their personal versions of ethnic life.

In the context of American modernism, the quest to frame into a coherent whole an urban environment that had undergone dramatic changes involved both Anglo-Saxon and ethnic writers. *Jews Without Money*, a powerful depiction of immigrant life in the modern American metropolis, has to be understood as part of this artistic effort. The strength of Gold’s book lies in the equilibrium between politics and modernism achieved through a rigorous stylistic discipline. This choice elicited attacks from many left-wing intellectuals, who blamed the author for having allowed only marginal space to “true” proletarian issues (Klein 185). By deferring meaning and concealing his own political vision, though, Gold leads the reader through a new hell where people, sounds, smells, violence and exploitation emerge as primary features of the daily life of immigrant neighborhood. It is only at the end of the journey that the writer/narrator unmasks himself and cries out his “revelation.” The style Gold borrowed from other modernist writers intends to show life in the metropolis as a battleground where the individual is lost and overwhelmed, a seemingly incomprehensible enigma that only the final reference to Marxism – providing an interpretative frame which connects economic growth, development, urbanization and immigrant exploitation into a single thread – can illuminate.
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Małgorzata Rutkowska

American Travelogue Revisited:
Henry Miller’s *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*

In 1939 Henry Miller left Paris, where he had been living for ten years and set out on a long journey to Greece. First, he stayed with Lawrence Durrell at Corfu, next he visited the Peloponneseus, Athens, ancient Eleusis, Epidaurus, Mycenae, and Knossos. The trip described in *The Colossus of Maroussi* (1941) is a record of Miller’s spiritual transformation and rebirth experienced in these mythic sites. Summing up his Greek epiphany, Miller confesses:

I never knew that the earth contains so much; I had walked blindfolded, with faltering, hesitant steps; I was proud and arrogant, content to live the false, restricted life of the city man. The light of Greece opened my eyes, penetrated my pores, expanded my whole being. I came home to the world, having found the true center and the real meaning of revolution. (241)

Unfortunately, “having found the true center” Miller could not stay there and, to escape the imminent war, he was forced to return to the United States. In 1941, the year when *The Colossus* was published, the author was on a transcontinental car trip across his homeland. However, the experiences of the American journey turned out to be radically different from the Greek pilgrimage. While *The Colossus* can be read as a loving homage to the Greek civilization and the Greek people, their unique spirit, wisdom and philosophy of life, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* contains mostly bitter and unsparing criticism of the American way of life, popular culture, technology and all-pervasive materialism.

Among the twentieth-century classics of American travel writing, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* is an exceptional book in both form and content. On the one hand, its author has broken most generic conventions of road narratives but, on the other, his explorations have remained true to the central idea of American travel, which is a personal quest for the national identity. Moreover, with his travelogue Miller initiated a new subgenre of “protest road narratives,” which questioned American complacency and expressed rebellion against dominant values of progress, success and utility, anticipating the spirit of the Beats (Primeau 36).
Thematically, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* belongs to the broad category of homecoming travel narratives, yet unlike typical exiles, the expatriate Miller does not dream of returning home. In fact, his motivation for making the journey is paradoxical as he seeks reconciliation with home in order to leave it.

I felt the need to effect a reconciliation with my native land. It was an urgent need because, unlike most prodigal sons, I was returning not with the intention of remaining in the bosom of the family but of wandering forth again, perhaps never to return. I wanted to have a last look at my country and leave it with a good taste in my mouth. (10)

Moreover, he is not willing to explore how the flow of time affected the familiar landscapes, people and places and to ponder the meaning of change, a pattern frequently employed by the authors of homecoming travel books. Typically, in such texts, the joy of revisiting familiar places is often dimmed with nostalgia and the authors tend to idealize the past but neither of these feelings is present in Miller’s critical account.

Even though Miller eventually settled down in Big Sur, California, his initial prediction that the return is only temporary points to a complicated relation between the writer and his native land. For most travelers, the opposition between home and abroad, between the internalized cultural values and the alien world of the “other” constitutes a crucial point of reference. Terry Caesar claims, however, that the contrary is true for some American modernist writers, in whose case “alienation with a stable relation with home comes to serve a normative function” (109), and this statement certainly pertains to Miller who seems to be “gloriously alienated – most simply from American society, but more profoundly from any society” (108). Even in Paris, his home for ten years, Miller claimed “I’m not an American anymore, nor a New Yorker, and even less a European, or a Parisian… I’m a neutral” (*Tropic* 35, 157).

However, Miller finds it hard to remain neutral when, whether he wants it or not, the curious and enthusiastic Greeks treat him as a representative American. Upset by the esteem the natives feel for his country and by their dreams of immigration, Miller in vain emphasizes the negative aspects of American reality: poverty, unemployment, restlessness and lost ideals. Predictably, his interlocutors react with disbelief, judging him to be “the strangest American they had ever met” (6-7). In fact, the American writer and the poor Greek peasants on his way find it extremely hard to communicate as their respective visions of Greece stem from radically different experiences; “a holy land” of ancient

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civilization and mythic heroes for the traveler is but a poor and backward country for the natives.

If Greece is Miller’s dreamscape, a landscape upon which the vision of a harmonious coexistence of people and land is projected, America becomes “the air-conditioned nightmare,” a place where “the divorce between man and nature [is]… complete” (18). According to Gaston Bachelard, there exists a link between a house and dreaming, since “the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (6). Characteristically, with the notable exception of an old Southern mansion belonging to his friend, Miller does not feel protected in American houses or hotels. In spotless, comfortable, air-conditioned rooms he suffers from depression or is haunted by fears and nightmares (24).

It is interesting to note that the very impression of the first American house, which he sees from the deck of the ship, foreshadows Miller’s sense of alienation. “I didn’t like the look of the American house; there is something cold, austere, something barren and chill, about the architecture of American home. It was home, with all the ugly, evil, sinister connotations which the word contains for a restless soul” (10). As this passage implies, there is neither joyous anticipation nor recognition of the familiar in Miller’s first view of the American shore. As a rejected, misunderstood artist he feels unwelcome home, comparing himself to “a runaway slave” brought back to New York he once escaped, and trapped again in the place he hates (11). In a conversation with a friend, a Hungarian immigrant, he confesses that he instantly felt at home in Budapest and that he loved Paris but feels alien at his birth-place. “In fact, I feel at home everywhere, except in my native land” (21). It is no wonder that home perceived in such negative terms is not a place to stay but to escape again, thus Miller begins to plan a journey so as “to experience something genuinely American… to get out in the open” (11).

Reflected in Miller’s narrative, the conviction that the authentic American experience is to be found outside the big cities is one of the cornerstones of contemporary travel writing. Countless twentieth-century travelogues have been devoted to exploring the back roads and blue highways of provincial America. Miller chooses the quintessentially American means of transport and buys his first car ever; then, after six driving lessons, he sets out South with his friend, the painter Abe Rattner. However, unlike most narratives of American travel, The Air Conditioned Nightmare neither specifies the traversed route nor preserves the chronology of events. The loosely connected chapters foreground a collage of topics, ranging from painting, music, Hindu philosophy, cultural

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2 Classic examples include John Steinbeck’s Travels with Charley (1962) and William Least Heat Moon’s Blue Highways (1984).
and intellectual differences between Europe and America, to car problems. Even the title is untypical of the genre as it does not name the destination or contain any hint that the book is a record of actual travel.

Unlike in his account of the Greek journey, Miller fails to keep in balance two essential components of a travel book: namely, the actual journey in time and space should parallel the spiritual or “temperamental journey” that enables the reader an insight into the author’s mind (Kowalewski 9). The author’s “internal voyage” clearly predominates in the text: an interesting book, a peculiar name, an accidental meeting become pretexts for recollections, musings or visions that have little in common with the actualities of travel. This is why, in the book about the USA, there are, for example, two chapters devoted entirely to the author’s French experiences (“Vive la France!”, “A Night with Jupiter”).

Miller seems to follow the tradition of the British inter-war travelogues whose authors combined travel accounts with essays on all possible topics of interest (Fussell 204-206). The subject that Miller evidently finds inspiring is the interconnectedness of dream and travel. He starts the chapter “My dream of Mobile” by recalling great explorers and discoverers – “men who dreamed, and then realized their dreams. Men filled with wonder, with longing, with ecstasy. Sailing straight for the unknown, finding it, realizing it, and then returning to the straight jacket. Or dying of fever in the midst of a mirage” (158). This is a romantic view of travel as a heroic quest, a test of manly stamina and courage. Such epic journeys inspired by dreams and fantasies are hardly possible in the contemporary world unless one chooses to travel in the imagination and this is precisely what Miller does. With the line “Admiral Farragut steamed into Mobile Bay” in mind, the writer envisages a city he never actually visited – a white city with “mandolinish” name, where streets are littered with confetti and people sit on the verandahs drinking Absinthe and “breaking paw-paws.” The city is filled with music and gaiety, but above all it is eternal: “as it was in the time of Saul, as were the days for the Colossians and the nights for the Egyptian, so it is now” (163-168). In other words, a trip may begin and end in the imagination and, unsurprisingly, imaginary journeys are much more satisfying than real ones as they prevent the traveler from the confrontation with the disappointing reality.

“What a different book it would have been!” – Miller confesses on the first page of his travelogue, regretting he had not written an account of imaginary American travels back in Paris (9).

Thus, the Preface to The Air-Conditioned Nightmare anticipates the recurring motif of dreams clashing with reality. Symptomatically, Miller summarizes of the whole experience in the Preface and the first chapter. As a result, even before reading more about

3 Prior to the book publication in 1945, many of these essays were separately published in magazines and anthologies in the USA and abroad.
the actual trip, the reader learns that it did not help the writer to become reconciled with his homeland and only strengthened his alienation. A page-long catalogue of the most notable experiences of the trip soon gives way to a more general discussion of the American way of life. Miller creates a bleak image of American society, listing its cardinal sins, failures, and mistakes. First of all, he reproaches his countryman for betraying the noble ideals of democracy: “We have degenerated; we have degenerated the life which we sought to establish on this continent” (27). He perceives America as a spiritual and cultural wasteland, and Americans as restless, unhappy people, obsessed with the idea of “false progress,” endlessly craving for money (22). He sees the betrayal of the founding republican principles in social injustices and racial prejudices.

The tone of the Preface is angry, bitter, and disillusioned; it is evident that by articulating his charges Miller tries to understand why “a great human experiment” (18) failed to establish the foundation for a brave new world. As Primeau rightly observes, “[b]y assaulting readers with fire-and-brimstone homilies and drawing them into his discontinuous patterns, Miller opens up a dialogue on the American culture ha had left” (34). The writer presents America’s downfall as a gradual process. The decimation of the native peoples, the cruelty of the civil war, the wasteful use of natural resources – these are all signs of the slow but inevitable erosion of values. Miller blames his ancestors for betraying “the dreams and visions of great Americans” (2). He declares that contemporary America, where “the poet is anathema, the thinker a fool, the artists an escapist, the man of vision a criminal,” is “not the world I want to live in” (22).

For Miller, Americans are people of captive minds: a vulgar mob that yields to manipulation and feeds on false ideologies. They have limited aspirations due to poverty, they lack human dignity due to stupefying factory work – Henry Ford’s empire is a negative example here – and finally, they find nourishment in popular culture, epitomized by Walt Disney’s products. America has created a civilization of things: “It is a word cluttered with useless objects which men and women, in order to be exploited and degraded, are taught to regard as useful” (22).

Though expressed in a different language, Miller’s diagnosis of the illness that troubles America resembles H. D. Thoreau’s claim about “improved means to an unimproved end” (49). Similarly to Thoreau a hundred years earlier, Miller is not against progress as such. However, he warns his readers against the faith in “false progress,” against using technology only for improvement of material existence while the artistic or spiritual needs are neglected (30-31). He also hopes that the war may provide a stimulus for a change of the heart, an occasion for “a conversion” of his compatriots (22). Again, this belief echoes Thoreau’s call to simplify our lives and return to the deliberate life, in which one faces only its “essential facts.”
Apart from the jeremiad-like rhetoric of his book, Miller seems to be a precursor of the typically American approach to travel so popular with contemporary authors. His journey is first and foremost an opportunity to meet and talk to people. As the writer feels contempt for the typical American, who looks “as though he were turned out by the university with the aid of a chain store cloak and suit house,” a mass product of dominant ideology of success (40), he is fascinated by those who stand out from the crowd. In the book he gives voice to artists, visionaries, lunatics and even criminals. What these individuals have in common is an internal drive, a passion for life according to their own principles even if it entails hostility from or rejection by the society. Miller, an outsider himself, clearly sympathizes with those Americans who remain marginal, neglected and unappreciated by the majority.

To create his vision of America, Miller often resorts to the technique of comparison and contrast; for example, he evokes an image of the virgin land prior to the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers and juxtaposes it with the contemporary industrial wasteland. The very first description of the American urban landscape, filled with bridges, railroad tracks, warehouses and factories reveals Miller’s strong anti-industrial bias: “[T]here was nothing of the animal, vegetable or human kingdom in sight. It was a vast jumbled waste created by pre-human or sub-human monsters in a delirium of greed. It was something negative, some not-ness of some kind or other” (11). The urban and industrial North is, in turn, set against the “backward,” but less devastated, rural South. Finally, the sublime and majestic wilderness is contrasted with man-made structures and the latter pale into insignificance in the face of American nature.

Miller’s dislike and contempt of American cities parallels his admiration for American nature. In the cities he never visits famous sights or landmarks, instead focusing his attention on the slums, flea markets or industrial districts. “None of them is the worst” – he concludes, thinking about the towns he saw. “The worst is in the process of becoming. It’s inside us now, only we haven’t brought it forth” (38). Miller decries the big cities for ugliness and sterility but he finds the striking landscapes of the West invigorating. He is fascinated with “the land of enchantment” in the Southwest, greatly impressed with the Grand Canyon and moved by the lush greenery of California. According to Kris Lackey, Miller’s “divided judgment” of the USA, marked by a celebration of American nature and a concomitant rejection American culture, is reminiscent of Charles Dickens and Henry James who were similarly ambiguous in their responses to America (44).

Faced with the scenic beauty of natural wonders in the West, Miller conventionally casts himself in the role of a humble pilgrim who pays homage to magnificent nature and its Creator. When the traveler follows the route of nineteenth-century pioneers he describes, for example, his first view of “the wildest, greenest green imaginable” – Califo-
nia – with true exaltation. He adds: “I wanted to go back through that pass – Cajon Pass – on foot, holding my hat reverently in my hand and saluting the Creator” (214). At the same time, his sense that “seated in an automobile, hemmed in by a horde of Sunday afternoon maniacs, one can’t possibly experience the emotion which such a scene should produce in the human breast” (214) and his wish for a repetition of this experience make him exceptional among the fellow travel authors. As Kris Lackey notes, American travelers who invariably get to the wonders of nature in a car and frequently express a concern about the threats posed to the wilderness by civilization, seem to forget that their own car is also a product of the same civilization. Thus, Miller’s awareness of this connection is indeed unique (41).

Even though he treats the car as a symbol of the American way of life, he questions its positive connotations with freedom, independence or escape. For him, the car is “the very symbol of falsity and illusion” (29), as thousands of automobiles parked in front of American factories create an image of false prosperity. No one seems too poor to own one. The working masses across the world envy Americans their “shining tin chariots,” often considered to be a veritable confirmation of the American dream. However, according to Miller, to win this prize the American worker must devote himself totally to the most stupefying, dehumanizing work (30). In this light, the car is no longer a means to make its owner a free man, on the contrary, it appears as a truly devilish invention, an object of desire that makes people sacrifice their bodies and souls to get it. Yet, in a comic chapter “Automotive Passacaglia,” Miller recounts his car adventures and conversations with mechanics to finally arrive at the following conclusion: “We American people have always been kind to animals and other creatures on the earth. It’s in our blood. Be kind to your Buick or Studebaker. God gave us these blessings in order to enrich the automobile manufacturers. He did not mean for us to lose our tempers easily” (189). In this passage the car acquires a status similar to that of domestic animals that serve people. It is a “blessing,” God’s gift to help humans strive for perfection. In the course of time, as he acquires greater driving experience, Miller realizes that the car is indeed something more than just a machine and begins to feel that his Buick, the only traveling companion he has, needs to be treated well and occasionally coaxed into cooperation.

“If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer,” writes H.D. Thoreau in Walden (285). Henry Miller was certainly an artist who “stepp[ed] to the music he hear[d]” and thus waited longer for recognition at home than abroad. His most famous novel, the scandalizing Tropic of Cancer, published in France in 1934, appeared in the USA only in 1961. His other books: Black Spring (1936) and Tropic of Capricorn (1939) had also been prohibited by censorship.
The Colossus of Maroussi (1941) and The Air-Conditioned Nightmare (1945) were therefore the first books published by Miller in the USA. It is worth considering them jointly as the context provided by The Colossus of Maroussi makes it easier to understand why American travels were so disappointing for the author.

Miller himself considered The Colossus of Maroussi his best book (Kersnowski and Hughes xiii). The Greek journey follows closely the pattern of a spiritual pilgrimage, which leads to epiphany and transformation of the self. Greece becomes for the traveler an epitome of culture that has managed to preserve the greatness of human spirit and guard it against the encroaching modernity. Miller’s loving admiration for Greece accounts, at least partially, for his rejection of America in the next book. After his metamorphosis in Greece, it would be strange to expect a similar experience to happen again so shortly. Apart from that, it would sound unconvincing if a declared critic of American civilization suddenly saw its charms upon returning home. His American travelogue lacks the kind of unity of tone which, in the book about the Greek journey, results from the positive experiences constituting the narrative core.

As a travel book, The Air-Conditioned Nightmare is indebted to both American and European traditions of the genre. The former is manifested, for example, in Miller’s rationale for making the trip, the direction (South and West), and the preoccupation with the national ideals. Wandering across his country, Miller, absent for decades, tries to re-establish a bond with his land. Rather conventionally, he rejects the East and the urban landscapes of big cities but delights in American nature. Intuitively, he chooses the quintessentially American way of traveling. A solitary car journey (his friend Abe Rattner had to return home after a few weeks) allows him to meet and talk to the people whose stories he recounts. At the same time, Miller is clearly indebted to the European tradition of intellectual travel and creates in the text a narrative persona of an erudite, a connoisseur of modern painting, philosophy, and music. Travel is for him often just a pretext for intellectual musings and for the presentation of the ideas which fascinate him. Such a perspective on travel is more frequently found in the accounts written by the European authors about America.

Though the journey was made in 1941, Miller decided to postpone the publication of The Air-Conditioned Nightmare as he was afraid that his critique of America would not be well received in the atmosphere of patriotism preceding WWII.

It is worth noting that Miller’s travelogue belongs, in a way, to the rich and predominantly British collection of travel books inspired by Greece in the first half of the twentieth century. As Mark Cocker asserts, “no country… has given rise to a richer collection of works, or played a more important part in the genre in the last fifty years” (206).

Two most famous examples of such narratives would be Umberto Eco’s Travels in Hyperreality (1975) and Jean Baudrillard’s America (1986).
The Air-Conditioned Nightmare stands out among American road classics because of its scathing criticism of the writer’s homeland, redeemed only by irony and humor. The vision of America, with its materialism, cult of technology and progress, and superficial morality, resembles the image of Ginsberg’s Moloch, devouring the human hearts and minds. Miller’s narrative of “rebellion and protest” clearly shows the roots underlying the Beats’ contestation a decade later.

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While it would be hard to find direct followers of Miller’s approach among American travel authors, his book has directly inspired a Canadian, Norman Levine. In Canada Made Me (1958), the author acknowledges his debt to Miller in the epigraph and presents a similarly bleak picture of his native country.
The 1936 Map of Yoknapatawpha
as an Ideological Space

The map below, drawn by William Faulkner, was originally published with the first edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936.\(^1\) As it happens with literary maps, it was treated by the publishers as an unnecessary supplement, and is not to be found in many later editions.

The present analysis of the 1936 map will make use of an apparatus that would have been impossible for either the readers or the writer at the time of the publication of *Absalom, Absalom!* It will focus on the ideological struggle embedded in the map which represents a dysfunctional world composed of the old antebellum social order and a rapacious modernity of the early twentieth century. Because of the limited space, certain crucial aspects of the significance of Faulkner’s map will have to be omitted, such as the relation between the cartographical image of Yoknapatawpha and Faulkner’s home county, Lafayette, or the similarity of the map to the medieval T-O *mappa mundi* maps.

There have been critical discussions of the symbolic orders signified by the 1936 map, usually based on the novels themselves without referencing the map, while this article explores, precisely, the map itself and uses the novels to provide clarification, to identify necessary details, and to expose omissions or, in a few instances, errors and inconsistencies. The aim of the present study is not to prove that the map is more “real” or “true to life” than the novels, but rather to show that it is an inherent part of the literary universe created by Faulkner and as such it is related, in complicated ways, to the narrative works of the great writer. It is characterized by the presence of re-workings, re-articulations, borrowings, amendments and alterations. The 1936 map is a representative, complex, ever-revised text by Faulkner. There were in fact two 1936 maps, and just as in the case of *Sartoris* and *Flags in the Dust*, the original version intended by the author was published at a much later date.

When we look at the elegant lettering and think of the amount of work Faulkner must have invested in the map to give it a recognizable aesthetic shape, we can only agree with Thomas L. McHaney who states that the image of Yoknapatawpha gave the reading public a clue to the work of an incredibly protean writer who, viewed through the prism his individual novels, continually changed his literary forms and thus, at least to less sophisticated readers, did not

\(^1\) The 1936 map was not the only cartographical representation of Yoknapatawpha created by Faulkner. A second one was *drawn for The Portable Faulkner* (1946) and depicts a significantly different reality, which, sadly, cannot be analyzed within the limits of this text.
The 1936 Map (Regular Edition) (Absalom, Absalom!) (by permission of Random House)
produce a “brand name” kind of writing. McHaney ultimately finds Faulkner’s creation a “joke, or… misappropriation of the device” that “resembles the kinds of cartography often seen in re-issued classics, where they help the reader ‘see’ the action” (521). This may be the case, but the map allows us to see no action if we are not familiar with the novels, and was probably created, as McHaney admits, “for his own purposes, perhaps to recall how much of the territory he had used or to scout out new ground” (525). It is therefore an important source for examining Faulkner’s attitudes, stereotypes and methods connected both to the reality and the invention.

The date of publication of the 1936 map places it close to the chronological beginning of Faulkner’s famous literary project, seven years after the first Yoknapatawpha publication and twenty six before the last one. However, the map should not be mistaken for an early or insignificant creation, as it is based on some of Faulkner’s best work and even references a number of stories and novels that still had to be published at the time.

As Małgorzata Grzegorzewska observes, “[r]ecent cartographic criticism informs us that each map is but a version of the Barthean myth, perceived as innocent speech: although readers tend to mistake it for a record of ‘facts,’ what it really conveys is a set of values” (149). In other words, we should “accept that maps act as a visual metaphor for values enshrined in the places they represent” (Haley 47-48). Due to their figurative meanings, maps are “a part of a discourse that intends to persuade and convince, are never impartial and hence they can be conceptualized as inherently rhetoric images” (Ziarkowska 119). Seen in this way, the 1936 map becomes one of the ways in which Faulkner describes the fall of the South and its inevitability. In his discussion of the images of women and African-Americans in Faulkner’s writing, Philip M. Weinstein emphasizes the usefulness of such cartographic assumptions and readings: “Like doodling, marginalia may comprise less examined markings: more able to escape the mind’s censorship, more likely to accommodate fugitive energies not welcome within the central enterprise” (44). This statements points to three crucial concepts: “marginalia,” “fugitive energies,” and “central enterprise”. Marginalia are, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “marginal notes,” “written or printed in the margin of a page,” “of, on, or pertaining to the edge of the field of consciousness.” They allow the unspoken to surface and the problematic to be visible. “Fugitive energies” is an expression taken from Michel Foucault and related to his idea that “knowledge is always a form of power” and “is not an ‘object’ that can be seized, held or lost, but a network of forces in which power always meets with resistance” (Macey 134). “The central enterprise,” in turn, presupposes a “margin,” creating the tension, resistance and space for the rebellious marginalia.

The dichotomy at the heart of the 1936 map is the center vs. margin opposition: the struggle between the defunctive Antebellum South (center) and its abnormal modernity.
(periphery) tainted by the past sins. The old system is represented by a number of imperishable, meaningful landmarks. The modernity is shown through lost and atypical people trying to uphold the values of the old, dead system (e.g. Quentin or Rosa), fighting against its momentum (e.g. Joe or Joanna) or deliberately exploiting its weakened state (the Snopeses).

**The Old South: the Courthouse and the Confederate Monument**

No matter how defective was the world of Faulkner’s design, its founding ethos is presented on the map in a lofty, powerful and static manner. It is lofty because its main markers are the Courthouse, the Confederate Monument, and the effigy of (Confederate) Colonel Sartoris, the three epitomes of values lasting, unchangeable and sustained by law, tradition and people larger-than-life. The power of these spatial elements has to do with the fact that they occupy the center of the “known world.” They remain invariably static: buildings, statues, and names standing for their own imperishable nature, even if they are reduced to but empty signifiers. They speak of the old world while, interestingly, its downfall is not mentioned directly. They commemorate a conquered civilization and reflect its governing rules. They are opposed by the active layer of the “individual signs” on the map.

The legal system of the antebellum South, emblematized by the Courthouse, is presented in a way that suppresses its greatest sin – slavery, its greatest fear – miscegenation, and, in general, any sign of the fall after the Civil War. The historical events have been erased, and only ghosts like Rosa Coldfield or ruins like the Old Frenchman Place have been left of history. The significance of the Courthouse is best expressed in *Requiem for a Nun*, published fifteen years after the 1936 map: “But above all, the courthouse: the center, the focus, the hub… musing, brooding, symbolic and ponderable, tall as cloud, solid as rock, dominating all” (35). The Courthouse is a symbol of the laws of the Old South, of the idea of an organic society where each class and each race had a specific, predetermined place. The whites were the guardians and protectors of the childlike blacks. White women were chaste and ethereal, white men brave and just. The actualities of the 1936 map are strikingly different from such imaginings: there are no African Americans, the women are far from being ladies, and the men are abusive and unpredictable.

**The Women**

The antebellum women were placed on a high pedestal where they could “be pious and pure, domestic and submissive” (Williamson 345). The seven female inhabitants implied on the 1936 map are far from such an image. They share a set of common characteristics: they are all white, all single (or dead), all located close to or heading for Jef-
Faulkner’s most famous statement about women is the following: “I think that women are marvelous, they’re wonderful, and I know very little about them” (Deborah Clarke 126). The female characters in Faulkner’s fiction are invariably symbols of the Other, with the powerful and silent ciphers like Caddy Compson or Lena Grove. There is little space on the map for women to achieve self-fulfillment, as they are objectified by the male gaze. None of them is black, as pointed out by Beth Widmaier: “female subjectivity and racial identity are kept separate, as if the two forms of Otherness conjoined would prove too subversive” (23). This seems to be an understatement in the case of the 1936 map, which altogether excludes African Americans. The point is that in Faulkner’s fiction we find important and powerful black or partly-black women who are not included in the map. For example, there is no place there for Dilsey Gibson from The Sound and the Fury, “one of Faulkner’s noblest characters, chief among those who ‘endure’” (Kirk 32), or Clytie from Absalom, Absalom!, “protector and avenger” who “figuratively embodies the forces which defeat white southern patriarchy and literally sets in motion the final stage of the fall of the house of Sutpen” (Deborah Clarke 127).

All the women included in the map are single or dead, and none of them appears to be involved in any kind of stable or “typical” relationship. There are two “Misses,” one an old spinster (Rosa Coldfield), and the other dead (Joanna Burden). Belle Mitchell in Sartoris is referred to by the name of her first husband, not the name that she will have received later (Benbow). She is also one of the characters in Sanctuary, and her presence as Horace’s wife is implied by the “Benbow’s” household. The problem with Belle in Sartoris is that she is absent through most of the novel and seems to be completely indifferent to her husband, which suggests a rather dysfunctional marriage. Temple Drake in Sanctuary “is kidnapped and raped by a Memphis bootlegger and then succumbs to the immorality of the underworld” (Hamblin 107). Lena Grove in Light in August escapes from her family and travels the country in search of a man who made her pregnant and promised to “send for her.” Miss Quentin Compson in The Sound and the Fury has no “legitimate” relationship either, as she “runs away with Charlie, the carnival man in the red tie” (Kirk 32). The only character that seems to have been in a rather stable relationship is Addie Bundren in As I Lay Dying, but the map indicates her death, thus, in the end, in the design there is not a single female character involved in a stable relationship. Apparently, the map illustrates, in a striking way, a certain deficiency, seen by the critics as prominent in Faulkner’s fiction, namely the failure of marriage and the failure of the family: “Faulkner’s major characters lived and moved upon a marital and sexual landscape that was in shambles” (Williamson 369).
Faulkner drew the map, placing Jefferson, or more precisely, “the Courthouse” and “the Confederate Monument” at its very heart. If we consider the spatial distribution of the women we clearly see that they are located near the center of this symbolic space. Even Addie, whose journey starts forty miles South-East of Jefferson, is buried in the cemetery near the center of the map. A number of farms and estates are also included in the map, like “Tull’s” or “McCallum’s,” which signifies the presence of whole families or at least the possibility of such presence. However, these are located outside the center, near the borders of the county. It would appear that Faulkner did not want a typical family to occupy the space in the center of his world and narration. The only female character that is clearly not in the center is Miss Quentin Compson, whose trail was lost in Mottstown, a place outside the map. She is, however, a character that breaks the most important rule that the map’s symbolic order imposes on women. She is active and therefore cannot be allowed to appear near the center. Joanna Burden, who tries to be true to her own beliefs and acts on them is killed. The center does not permit any violation of its standards.

None of the women is close to the ideal of the lady that was “rooted in slavery” and “persisted long after Emancipation” (Widmaier 25). In short, this ideal represented a chaste, modest, privileged, white woman. Of the six living women present on the map one gives birth out of wedlock (Lena), one elopes with her lover (Miss Quentin), one is killed by her lover (Joanna), one remains a spinster (Rosa), one can be suspected of nymphomania (Temple), and one “is repeatedly associated with rank sexuality: filth, unpleasant smells, heat, flesh, and rottenness” (Belle) (Hamblin 254). The women may be white, but they do not live up to the primary requirement for the Southern lady, which is chastity. The ideal of the Southern woman was dissociated from male sexual desires, which were mostly projected onto the animal-like black females. In Faulkner’s world, the women never embody the traditionally defined chastity, although they are not asexual. Symptomatically, hardly ever are they caring mothers, which is very much in keeping with Faulkner’s interest in dysfunctional families (the Compsons, the Sartorises, the Sutpens, the Benbows).

Last but not least, the female characters of the 1936 map are inactive and have been denied proper subjectivity; they are obedient, objectified beings. This is a reductive view of Faulkner’s women, who are often complex literary characters, but such a view is justified by the map alone, a “text” much simpler and more direct than the novels. The objectification of the female characters has an interesting grammatical dimension. There are altogether seven instances in which women are noted on the map. In four cases, there is a total of six sentences concerning women, all in the past tense and casting the women as objects: “could not cross it with Addie’s body,” “where they buried Addie,” “where
Christmas killed Miss Burden.” “where Jason Compson lost his niece’s trail.” “where Byron Bunch first saw Lena Grove,” and “where Lena Grove’s child was born.” In three instances, the women are recognized only as owners of property: “Belle Mitchell’s,” “Miss Rosa Coldfield’s” and “Miss Joanna Burden’s,” and the contexts point to the property, not to the women. There is only one instance where a female character is active, but it serves as a crowning moment in the map’s objectification of the women: Temple Drake’s act of testifying.

The statistics regarding the use of the past tense and the number of sentences with the women as objects lead to conclusions which may seem far fetched, but remain quite telling, especially in the light of the amount of information about men. There are twenty two sentences with male subjects and only one with a woman in the same function. The only sentence in the present tense evokes a great dead male figure, Col. Sartoris. The patriarchal system is in full force here, creating a world which forbids women to act and leaves them dead, fugitive or unmentioned. The women are not only marginalized, but also contained within a set of tropes, such as the identification of property. The map tells us nothing about Miss Joanna’s attempt to kill Christmas, Addie’s insistence that her body be transported to Jefferson, or Dewey Dell Bundren’s presence among Anse’s “sons.” In two instances, the women are clearly denied subjectivity despite their direct involvement in the events described: Lena Grove is not an agent when she gives birth to a child, and Miss Quentin Compson is not a fugitive person, but only a trail that has been lost.

Paradoxically, the most revealing caption as far as the objectification of women is concerned is the only instance of female activity: “Courthouse where Temple Drake testified.” This is the only time when a woman is allowed to act, to be a subject and an agent at the very heart of the patriarchal symbolic order. The subjectivity, however, is not her own; it is temporarily and specifically required, determined and granted by the Law. On the map, apart from the testimony, Temple is but an invisible part of “Old Frenchman Place… where Popeye killed Tommy,” and it is only in the novel Sanctuary that she achieves a literary incarnation. The women of the map can be active when so required; it would appear that from the point of view of the Sole Owner and Proprietor women do not possess a general right to be active. The situation of men is strikingly different.

The Men

Out of thirty characters mentioned on the map twenty three are male, which obviously accounts for their prominence. It is impossible to describe them all within the limits of this article. The men of the 1936 map are: John Sartoris (Sartoris), (old) Bayard Sartoris
II (Sartoris) (young) Bayard Sartoris III (Sartoris), Byron Snopes (Sartoris), Flem Snopes (Sartoris), V.K. Surrat / Ratliff (Sartoris, As I Lay Dying, possibly Light in August), Benjy Compson (The Sound and the Fury), Jason Compson (The Sound and the Fury), Quentin Compson (The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom!), Anse Bundren (As I Lay Dying), the Boys / Sons of Anse Bundren (As I Lay Dying), Henry Armstid (As I Lay Dying), Will Varner (As I Lay Dying and Light in August), Lee Goodwin (Sanctuary), Popeye (Sanctuary), Byron Bunch (Light in August), Joe Christmas (Light in August), Gail Hightower (Light in August), Cassius de Spain (Absalom, Absalom!), Thomas Sutpen (Absalom, Absalom!), Wash Jones (Absalom, Absalom!) and Issetibbeha (Absalom, Absalom!). It is noteworthy that the number of male characters for each of the novels indicated is no fewer than three, while the biggest number of women was two and it was for a single book – Sanctuary. The men function both as subjects: “Old Frenchman’s Place which Flem Snopes unloaded on Henry Armstid and Surrat,” and as objects: “where Christmas was killed.” That they are both destructive and creative: “where Christmas killed Miss Burden,” “Fishing Camp… bought and restored by Major Cassius de Spain”; both victims and perpetrators: “where Popeye killed Tommy”; able to move both inside the County: “Church which Thomas Sutpen rode fast to” and outside its borders: “To Mottstown, where Jason Compson lost his niece’s trail.” The men enjoy a certain degree of freedom and do not need any “special” circumstances to become agents.

Similarly to the women, the men of Yoknapatawpha share a number of characteristics, and despite the diversity of the group, they are evidently opposed to the antebellum ideology. The main male feature in common is that the characters “do whiteness wrong, sometimes flamboyantly, spectacularly wrong” (Watson 10). The antebellum South believed that its men “should be protectors. Like knights of old slaying dragons, they should protect their ladies physically. Also they should be the material protectors, the providers who ‘bring home the bacon’ day by day for the comfortable support of their families” (Williamson 365). There are virtually no functional families in Faulkner’s fiction and women are much more likely to be assaulted and abused by men than protected by them. The only characters resembling, in some degree, the antebellum male ideal are the two Sartorises, the nestor of the clan John Sartoris and his son Old Bayard. The map presents them in the same way as it does the only “normally” married woman – Addie: they are both dead. The other men fail to create a normal family (Young Bayard, Horace Benbow, Hightower, Sutpen), show no such need, or are simply unable to start families (Joe Christmas, Jason Compson, nearly all the McCallums). They all belong to a social landscape where traditional families or “protective” males are of the rarest kind. Even the most romantically inclined character on the map, Byron Bunch, does not create
The 1936 Map of Yoknapatawpha as an Ideological Space

a family or homestead, and instead, he passively follows the object of his affections, and at some point he even attempts rape.

The scope of activities available to the men on the 1936 map is considerable in comparison with women and includes: becoming, buying, crossing, dying, failing, getting, going, killing, losing, lynching, needing, passing, restoring, seeing, selling, riding, robbing, unloading and watching. Out of the twenty verbs used in the map’s captions, eight are connected with loss or death, and only four with creation or acquisition. While the Yoknapatawphian women are destined to have things done to them, the males are fated to lose and die. Though some of the achievements marked on the 1936 map seem durable, Faulkner’s later fiction undermines their lasting significance. For example, the Fishing (& Hunting) Camp, bought and restored by Major Cassius de Spain, ceases to be a bridgehead into the wilderness, as “the paths made by deer and bear became roads and then highways, with towns in turn springing up along them” (Go Down Moses 325), and ultimately vanishes “thirty feet below the surface of a government-built flood-control reservoir” (Big Woods 170), covering also the remnants of Sutpen’s Hundred. The railroad built by John Sartoris stops functioning by 1935, as indicated in The Mansion (1959): Mink Snopes must hitch a ride to Jefferson as “there had not been a passenger train through Jefferson since 1935” and the line “was now a fading weed-grown branch line” (406). The achievements of Flem Snopes, who with the aid of his clan displaces and dispossesses the old aristocracy of the County, are not permanent either, as he is killed in revenge by his own kinsman and “appears immobile and even detached, too, until the blast sounds that ends his life” (Kirk 193).

Other male characters from the 1936 map are less creative, but more active. Joe Christmas kills and is killed, Young Bayard crashes his car, causing his grandfather’s heart failure, and escapes Eastward, Jason Compson travels to Mottstown and back, etc. All of these actions, whether criminal or not, are always related to the hub of the old symbolic order. While the spatial distribution of men on the 1936 map is far less restrictive than the apparent centralization of women, the actions of the male characters are mostly connected to Jefferson, which is either the setting or a point of departure / return. An analogous example is Thomas Sutpen’s “riding fast” towards the church located at the outskirts of the town. Importantly, all but one movements presented on the map indicate loss and oppose the old system. Young Bayard flees the crash scene acting against the pride and honor of his ancestors. Jason is forced to chase after his niece, who by the old code should be kept at home and closely guarded. Sutpen rides to the church with his family but in a way that has little to do with piety or respect for tradition. Moreover, he is killed on the outskirts of the map, which also signifies his detachment from the values of the old system. Flem Snopes, though apparently successful – moving from a store subject to a bank president – heralds
and brings about the ultimate fall of the antebellum values. Only the movement of Anse and his boys seems to be motivated and justified by the old “protective” social order, with its respect for the will of women, but it is, in fact, a selfish enterprise on the part of Anse who wants to get a new set of false teeth. The dynamics of male movements indicated on the map arises from a pervasive sense of failure and desperation.

Some of the characters remain relatively separated from the hub, for example Wash Jones in Fishing Camp and Popeye in Old Frenchman Place. These two are, however, murderers who avoid punishment. Popeye leaves the country and an innocent man is lynched for his crime. Wash Jones is not “properly” punished by the law, but simply gunned down, having attacked the sheriff with a scythe. These instances are a far cry from what the idealized order of the South demanded, namely that crime or injustice be followed by quick and relevant punishment, as suggested by the elements in the middle of the map. The central area marks two reactions to the violation of order and the subsequent mob justice. In both cases women are victimized. Joe Christmas is lynched and castrated after killing Miss Joanna Burden, and Lee Goodwin is lynched for the alleged rape of Temple Drake. In these two situations, the timocratic system tries to protect women, but its interventions take place only after the harm has been done.

Contrary to the women named on the 1936 map, the men possess inherent subjectivity, but their actions bespeak very little of “a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance” (Hoffman 348) that Faulkner talked about in his Nobel Prize speech. Their actions illustrate the collapse of the “old constructions of masculinities” (Rogers 126), and male subjectivity is essentially connected with death and loss.

The African-Americans

The most interesting aspect of the ideological significance of the 1936 map is has to do with its missing elements. Faulkner dubbed himself the “Sole Owner and Proprietor” of Yoknapatawpha, but the exclusions from the map imply that he was uncertain about the “ownership” of some elements. If we treat the cartographic representation of Yoknapatawpha as a frame of reference for the later works or an artistic statement of the writer saying “this is the conflicted world that I have created,” the empty places become the signifiers of the hidden, undefined and problematic issues.

There is a census at the bottom of the 1936 map, and it reads: “Population, Whites 6298; Negroes 9313.” These two numbers with the accompanying racial distinction are probably the most puzzling part of the map. There is but one presumed African-American on the map – Joe Christmas – and there are a few other hints of the black
presence, but no African American is directly recognized. This erasure suggests that while slavery and miscegenation were the original sins of the South, the white inhabitants of the region needed no external racial incentive to create a repugnant and destructive social order, or perhaps that its emergence was due to the lack of such an incentive. The reality where “black and white intimately coexist so as to make up the discursive racial economy of Faulkner’s texts” (Weinstein 44) is not reflected on the 1936 map. The 9313 African Americans exist only as a number, as if they had no influence on the conflicted reality within the map. Their possible influence is beyond representation.

The 1936 Maps as a Language of Power

The New Historicists assumes that “maps are pre-eminently a language of power, not of protest,” which helps to “conceal from the popular gaze the secret knowledge of the state: arcane imperii” (Grzegorzewska 153). The process of map-making consists of “selection, omission, simplification, classification, the creation of hierarchies, and ‘symbolization’,” which are inherently and invariably “rhetorical” (Harley 11), and create “symbolic structures” “seek[ing] to ‘impose’ themselves ‘upon space’” (G.G.N. Clarke 455).

The 1936 map presents a historical turning point when the old discredited system makes way for a new social reality. The “civilization” of the antebellum South of the 1936 map is unable to impose its values upon the people mentioned on the map; it becomes reduced to historical landmarks (the Confederate Monument) and desperate actions, such as lynching, which cannot prevent its downfall. The old system of the 1936 map fails to safeguard its people; the old aristocracy gradually loses its possessions and influences (the Compsons sell a pasture to send Quentin to Harvard; the Sartorises lose the presidency over the Bank). This dramatic social change coincides with the emergence of a rapacious and brutal modernity marked by murder, rape, cheating. The final collapse of the antebellum South – concomitant with the rise of the white trash – is also signaled on the 1936 map. Flem Snopes gets “his start” at “Varner’s Store,” a peripheral and insignificant location, and later becomes the president of a bank president, placed at the very heart of the old symbolic system. The causes of the social change reflected in the 1936 map are not identified. The original sins of the South, slavery and miscegenation, and the reason for its downfall, the Civil War, remain invisible. While the map’s cartouche indicates that African-Americans outnumber the white inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha, there are no “black” characters on the map (except for the allegedly black Joe Christmas). The map is an instance of the “language of power, not of protest,” with white people holding power in the antebellum as well.
as in the modern South. The absence of African-Americans from the map may signify that neither modern Yoknapatawpha nor the remnants of the Old South can be saved. On the 1936 map, the representatives of the antebellum South, or their descendants, have ultimately failed, while no characters that have “endured,” many of whom are African-Americans, are presented. The disintegration suggested by the map has no recognizable cause and no discernible cure, turning the Faulkner’s cartographic creation into a doomed and violent world.

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Justyna Rusak

“Sheltered Existence” as a Way to Self-Discovery in the Life and Fiction of Ellen Glasgow

If only women had been satisfied to remain protected, how much pleasanter the world, even the changing modern world, might be today! If only they had been satisfied to wait in patience, not to seek after happiness!... There could be nothing nobler in women than the beauty of long waiting and wifely forbearance...

Ellen Glasgow, *They Stooped to Folly: A Comedy of Morals*

Despite the difficulties inherent in their situation, women writers of the nineteenth-and early twentieth-century South sought their own voice to create an alternative, gender-specific vision of the region. For women, writing meant alienation from mainstream patriarchal culture. Therefore they developed a sense of what they could not be and gained awareness of how the past had “jilted” their mothers and grandmothers. As Louise Westling points out, this was the first step to self-discovery (36, 37), a personal process inextricably intertwined with the acknowledgment of the women’s common plight. The present article traces this process in the fictional and autobiographical writings of Ellen Glasgow.

Starting her literary career before World War I, Glasgow could be perceived as a forerunner of the Southern Renaissance and modernism. As Amy Thompson McCandless points out, Ellen Glasgow was “a transitional figure between the romanticization of the postbellum novel and the realism of modern southern fiction” (146). Glasgow’s literary intention was to provide a realistic portrayal of the South as a counter-reaction to the fiction that eulogized the antebellum South and transformed it into the mythical paradise lost. Questioning the cult of Southern womanhood, with its distribution of conventional gender roles, Glasgow can be counted among the precursors of the feminist tradition in Southern literature. Moreover, her depiction of the modernizing South reflects the tensions that were present in the early twentieth-century Southern consciousness, thus making Glasgow an insightful observer of social change.

“Born without a skin” (*The Woman Within* 5), as she was called by her African American mammy, Ellen Glasgow was early marked for extraordinary sensitivity and introspective nature. A daughter of Francis Glasgow, a stern Presbyterian ironworks executive,
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who gave his wife and children all the things they needed but love (15), and Anne Gholson, a Southern belle, a flower of the old Tidewater, who “would divide her last crust with a suffering stranger” (14), young Ellen felt torn within and homeless in the hostile world of opposing forces. Living in apparently cozy, affluent and comfortable conditions, Ellen Glasgow seemed to have been brought up in a “shelter,” which she understood as the whole civilization man has built to protect himself from reality. In the course of her life and career as a writer she fought against paternalism, which sustained Southern myths and conventions, sanctimony and hypocrisy of Southern religiousness or “evasive idealism,” so popular in the regional writing of the nineteenth-century South.

Glasgow’s first moment of self-discovery came in her infancy: on one occasion, when lying comfortably in a cradle, she was visited by a terrifying apparition – a vacant, malevolent face without a body. As she admits, in that moment she became aware of herself as well as of the universe apart from herself. Glasgow writes that since the age of eight she was “driven to unchildlike brooding over [her] sense of exile in a hostile world” (25). Her self-encapsulation in an apparently sheltered life was exacerbated by the pain caused by the partings with or deaths of her closest persons.

Her mammy’s unexpected departure, her mother’s sickness and her sister’s death, all had devastating effects on Glasgow’s frail nature. As a form of self-defence, Ellen developed a tendency to go “deeper and deeper into [herself]” and spun “the protective cocoon of indifference,” having realised that “an artificial brightness is the safest defence against life” (67). However, this brightness did not have to be artificial. When Glasgow suddenly fell in love with Gerald B.1, a married man, her gloomy view life greatly changed. As she recalls, the affection began as a sudden illumination and for seven years left her in “an arrested pause between dreaming and waking” (160). She felt suspended in “eternity” and experienced, even if relatively late in life, the “illusion of its own immortality” that the first love created (160).

The affection marked an important stage in Glasgow’s process of self-discovery: “The great discovery that my own identity, that I, myself, could triumph over brute circumstances, had destroyed and then re-created the entire inner world of my consciousness” (160). As she further admits: “this passionate awakening to life had restored my lost faith in myself” (157). Love virtually isolated her from the outside world and incited an inward force that made her look under the surface of things and lead a “secret life.”

1 The real identity of Gerald B. is debatable. Speculations based on Ellen Glasgow’s correspondence point at several names, including Walter Hines Page, Pearce Bailey, a New York doctor, Holbrook Curtis, another doctor, Hewitt Hanson Howland, an advisory editor at Bobbs-Merrill, and William Riggin Travers. Some critics even claim that his existence was pure fiction and it was the meaning of the relationship that counted more for the author’s artistic creation and inspiration than the real presence of the man in Glasgow’s life (Goodman 79, 83).
After seven years, however, the force that had emotionally elevated the artist pushed her into the abyss of despair. Gerald’s sudden illness and imminent death triggered off yet another mystic experience. While lying in the grass, Glasgow felt the Divine unity with nature, an illumination and “ecstasy” just like mystics, who “had attained Divine consciousness through a surrender of the agonized self. By giving up, by yielding the sense of separateness, by extinguishing the innermost core of identity.” Having found the communion with the Absolute, “or with Absolute nothingness,” Glasgow was strengthened in the belief that she should seek for God in her own soul (165).

The striving for inwardness marks Glasgow’s literary works. Early in her life, she discovered her true vocation, which led her to “some hidden forest of wonder and delight… to that strange exile to which all writers who are born and not made are condemned” (37). After her poems had been found and read aloud by her sister, she felt embarrassed and humiliated, and decided to write only in secret. After this incident she “began to live two lives twisted together.” One was the “external life” and the other her “interior world… thickly woven of recollections.” She felt “immersed in some dark stream of identity, stronger and deeper than the external movement of living” (40-41), and believed that she should be faithful to her “inner vision” (125). Consequently, she employed a mode of self-expression which, according to Helen Fiddyment Levy, evokes a “communal, ritualistic language, one she calls the ‘speech of heart’” (54).

_Virginia and Barren Ground_ are Glasgow’s two novels with autobiographical strands, which show contrasting sides of the writer’s personality. The title character of _Virginia_ is a docile, innocent girl; a daughter of the descendants of prominent antebellum families who lost their fortune after the Civil War. Despite poor conditions, Virginia’s family lives in the idealized world of aristocratic pre-war memories, where the quiet martyrdom in the name of faded glory and dignity is the price to be paid for evading truth about the changing South. Brought up in accordance with the patriarchal rule that “the less a girl knew about life, the better prepared she would be to contend with it” (22), Virginia Pendleton lacks an inquiring mind and deeply believes that a girl’s ultimate goal is marriage. Thus when she falls in love with and then marries an aspiring playwright Oliver Treadwell, she is in a state of bliss.

An obedient wife and devoted mother of three children, Virginia submissively invests her entire energy in family and housework. But her husband does not see a “mental companion” in her. Virginia does not even notice that with time her husband’s feelings for her dry out and that her love and sacrifice do not suffice to save the marriage. She seems to be unaware of the simple truth so aptly expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft in “A Vindication of the Rights of Women”: “the woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have

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much effect on her husband’s heart when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone” (593).

As Virginia is far from being a coquettish type, she believes that the power of devotion and wifely servility is the basis of a successful relationship and can win the heart of each man. Despite the signs of crisis in their marriage, Virginia pretends not to see her husband’s vices. Her idealized world is bound to fall into pieces, which happens when Oliver finds refuge from the suffocating love of his wife in the arms of a glamorous Broadway actress. Virginia goes to New York, hoping that he will atone, but by the door of his hotel room she gives up; she comes back home alone with a resolution to commit suicide. Her only consolation is a letter from her son, Henry, with a message of his homecoming.

Virginia Pendleton, presumably modelled on Ellen Glasgow’s mother, seems to live in a sheltered world, built on obsolete, antebellum values. Born into the reality “whitewashed” by her parents, young Virginia naturally tends to “evade unromantic reality” and perceive things in the way she wants them to appear. She completely depends on others, that is men; like her own mother, she has been taught to “endure martyrdom in support of the doctrine of inferiority to men” (200). Inevitably, Virginia shares the fate of passive and submissive Southern women, who are doomed to social insignificance and existential uncertainty. As she admits in a moment of illumination:

Was that a woman’s life, after all? Never to be able to go out and fight for what one wanted! Always to sit at home and wait, without moving a foot or lifting a hand toward happiness! Never to dare gallantly! Never even to suffer openly! Always to will in secret, always to hope in secret, always to triumph or to fail in secret. Never to be one’s self – never to let one's soul or body relax from the attitude of expectancy into the attitude of achievement. For the first time, born of the mutinous longing in her heart, there came to her the tragic vision of life. (152-153)

Virginia believes that “a real woman should be the embodiment of love and docility” (218), therefore she hides her suffering, jealousy, pain of unreciprocated love deep behind the manifestations of endurance and obedience. Defenceless and helpless as she seems to be, Virginia follows the guidance of strict moral values so deeply ingrained in her mind. Her spiritual experience is rooted in the faith in God and the feeling of communion with other women. The time of fighting with the disease of her beloved son, Henry, turns out to be crucial for Virginia’s reconciliation with her own feminine self. In the beginning, she is first overwhelmed by the motherly fears and the sense of isolation. As an offering for Henry’s health, “she [lays] her youth on the altar of the Power of
mercy.” For three subsequent days of frenzied prayers, Virginia feels as if she “had lived and died many times” and that “immensity of inner space separated her even from Oliver.” She finally realizes “that one is always alone when one despairs, that there is a secret chamber in every soul where neither love nor sympathy can follow one.” The time of test allows her to discover her own identity as a mother in a world where “love and suffering are inseparable” (358).

*Barren Ground*, Glasgow’s most overtly autobiographical novel, contrasts starkly with *Virginia* as far as the portrayal of the heroine is concerned. Unlike Virginia, who could boast of her antebellum aristocratic ancestry, Dorinda Oakley, born into a “land poor” farming family in Virginia, feels entrapped in the sordid existence of her parents, for whom only religion and hard work matter. She belongs to a class of “good people,” who “have preserved nothing except themselves” (5), and witnesses the vain struggles of her parents to cultivate the infertile soil with primitive farming methods. As Dorinda lacks Virginia’s belief in inherited antebellum ideas, she refuses to accept the helpless existence. She hopes to escape solitude and to change her depressing situation, when she falls in love with Jason Greylock, an impressionable young doctor. Engaged to be married and already pregnant, Dorinda finds out that her fiancé has just married another woman, apparently under pressure from his family.

Despite this blow Dorinda does not give up, owing all her courage and persistence to the inherited “vein of iron”: she sets off for New York to run away from gossip and start a new life. Conveniently enough, she suffers a miscarriage and spends the next few years with a befriended family. She finally returns to her home town with a strong intention to turn the declining homestead into a prosperous business. In the meantime, Jason’s marriage with Geneva Ellgood falls apart, ending up with the former’s alcoholism and the latter’s suicide. Dorinda’s strong will and fortitude allow her to conquer the eponymous “barren ground” and to establish a successful dairy farm. Despite success and esteem, she does not feel truly happy because the repressed feelings and memories continue to haunt her. Nevertheless, the land is a source of hope for her and a compensation for personal disappointments.

Having written the novel after personal turbulences connected with the broken relationship with Henry Anderson, known from her autobiography as Harold S—, and her suicidal attempt, Glasgow wrote in *The Woman Within* that the novel was “torn out” of her, and tellingly added: “I wrote *Barren Ground*, and immediately I knew I had found myself” (243). The self-discovery experienced by both the heroine and the writer comes from the ability to control instincts and emotions. Whereas Dorinda constantly repeats that she is “through with soft things” (309), that is female affections and obligations, Ellen Glasgow discovers that she was unfit for marriage and that “falling out of love...
could be blissful tranquillity” (244). According to Daniel Singal, Virginia retrieves her buried instinctual life from entombment beneath “the dead leaves of civilization,” while Dorinda follows the opposite direction and suppresses the same biological instincts for good (105), even if she cannot banish them from her dreams.

Having renounced love and motherhood, Dorinda may appear to be “barren,” just like the land that she tills used to be. Accordingly, she projects her femininity onto the earth. Her hidden craving to “bring fertility to her inner life is projected outward as a drive to bring fertility to the exterior world” (Huffman 97). To fill in the inner void, she elicits in herself the features of “fortitude” and “endurance.” Susan Goodman points out that “Dorinda creates an interior space that is remote, inviolate, and self-sufficient; nothing disturbs it” (83). As Glasgow puts it in her novel Vein of iron: “Not joy, not pain, not love, not passion, not sorrow, not loss, not life at its sharpest edge” (111). It is the land that finally helps Dorinda to recover her identity. She feels that “the spirit of the land was flowing into her, and her own spirit, strengthened and refreshed, was flowing out again toward life. This was the permanent self, she knew” (524). Full of hope and interior harmony, Dorinda looks ahead to what the future holds.

The present analysis of the three works by Ellen Glasgow suggests two conceptions of the female self-discovery. The heroines of Virginia and Barren Ground, seemingly sheltered by the patriarchal dominance and Southern conventions, undoubtedly would subscribe to Glasgow’s recurrent question: “How can an oversensitive nature defend itself against the malice of life?”

Virginia Pendleton chooses to encapsulate herself in the “martyred sainthood” of the Southern lady, which, according to Richard Gray, albeit defined by passivity, quiet suffering, and mute forbearance, can be seen as positively heroic (74-75). She finds her own identity in the feminine instincts, particularly in the experience of motherhood. Thus, the direction of her search is from “without” to “within.” However, the price Virginia pays for defending her values is loneliness and separation not only from her husband, but also from her children for whom she sacrificed herself.

Glasgow’s rejection of Virginia’s model for self-realization gives way to that of Dorinda, who finds feminine liberation in work. Similarly to Dorinda, who abandons the wasted, romantic, evasive model of Mrs Oakley and creates her own “vein of iron,” Glasgow, in Gray’s words, identifies herself with “the stern, active, unbending figure of the father” instead of the “pliant, passive, yielding figure of the mother” (88). Glasgow and her alter ego, Dorinda, try to escape their instinctual nature, to move from “within” to “without,” and inevitably face the troubling question, verbalized by Mary C. Anderson: “How is the female hero to define her own progress into self-consciousness and self-determination without alienating herself from her biology?” (385). According to
Helen Fiddyment Levy, the answer for both Dorinda and Glasgow is to get free from the anxiety of patriarchal influence through the denial of the “feminine” experience as defined by all the rationalizations of the bodily and the emotional in the dominant discourse (108). Writing for Glasgow and farm-work for Dorinda become the way to break through “impenetrable wall” of the haunting past. Yet, like Virginia, they pay the price of loneliness and isolation. The sheltered existence of Southern middle-class turns out to be a burden, not a relief, for sensitive women. But, as Eudora Welty writes in her autobiographical sketch “One Writer’s Beginnings”: “a sheltered life can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts from within” (948).

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Holocaust Pornography:
Obscene Films and Other Narratives

Is the Holocaust exceptional? One well-established school of thought holds that it is exceptional, which means that any attempt to understand or represent it – at least by non-witnesses – is obscene. The noted director of Shoah, Claude Lanzmann, describes his obligation as a filmmaker in these terms: “There is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding. Not to understand was my iron law during all the eleven years of the production of Shoah. I clung to this refusal of understanding as the only possible ethical and at the same time the only possible operative attitude” (“The Obscenity of Understanding” 204). In his famous documentary about the Holocaust, Lanzmann used no archival materials, interviewing only survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders (and the historian Raul Hilberg). Although he was a member of the French resistance during the War, Lanzmann (born 1925) did not spend time in a concentration camp, and therefore considered himself a mediator rather than a witness. But he lived in a country that was occupied by the Nazis and was complicit in the transport east of many of its Jews. The great majority of those he interviews in Shoah experienced the destruction of the European Jews first hand.

Lanzmann’s “obscenity” posits the Holocaust as a limit event, an absolute transgression of moral limits that requires tact and a strict respect for epistemological and representational limits. From this position Lanzmann derives not only an ethics but an aesthetics, one that distrusts representation in the modes of dramatization, exposition, and analysis. For him only the camera and the voice can (re-)present the experience of the Holocaust. Fictional representation and attempts to “understand” are out of bounds.

The extraordinary role played by the United States in memorializing the Holocaust has run counter to Lanzmann’s provisos. Although home to many thousands of survivors of ghettos and camps, the United States did not contain any of those sites; nor were any of the War’s battles fought on its soil. Nonetheless, almost every large American city has a Holocaust memorial, and its mass media have produced a series of feature films and television programs that have played a large part in raising the consciousness not only of its own citizens but of people elsewhere about events that led to the deaths of almost six million European Jews. The 1978 television series Holocaust had huge audiences in the United States as well as an enormous impact in then-West Germany when it was
released in translation the following year. Early plays and films such as the two versions of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (play 1955; film 1959) and *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) achieved large audiences in both the United States and Europe. Later films such as, in particular, *Schindler’s List* (1993), experienced the same kind of reception from a later generation of viewers in both North America and Europe. The opening of Washington, D.C.’s United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993 – in a building designed to resemble not only a concentration camp but a train station responsible for transporting prisoners to the camps – was a national event sponsored by the federal government. It remains one of the most frequented museums in the nation’s capital. The films and the museums are simulacra, available to remind viewers of the events they are experiencing second hand; but they create a vexed notion of what constitutes a memory, since those being asked to “never forget” have had no first-hand experience of what they are being asked to remember. Lanzmann might well think of such things as constituting obscenities. His attack on *Schindler’s List* suggests he believes that asking audiences to watch (false) representations of gassings and other such outrages are like subjecting them to pornography (“Holocauste”).

The word “obscene” suggests a link between ethical and representational limits, and it figures this link as a corporeal one. This essay takes Lanzmann’s judgment – and his register – seriously by exploring representations of the body in selected Holocaust novels and films from the immediate postwar years until roughly the 1980s. It argues that many early representations can be accurately described as obscene or pornographic, and that Holocaust pornography is a more widespread phenomenon than is usually recognized. Indeed, pornography is an important if uncomfortable precursor to trauma theory, acting out as passion what trauma theory will later describe in terms of the more archaic (and religious) meaning of passion, i.e., suffering or martyrdom. In both pornography and trauma theory the body becomes a site of excess, literally embodying what lies beyond

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1 We will treat obscenity and pornography as roughly synonymous terms, although there have been interesting attempts to distinguish them. Hal Foster proposes the following distinction based on an analysis of aesthetic distance: “Might this be one difference between the obscene, where the object, without a scene, comes too close to the viewer, and the pornographic, where the object is tagged for the viewer who is thus distanced enough to be its voyeur?” His follow-up question suggests the difficulty of maintaining this distinction: “In a sense this is the other part of the question: can there be an evocation of the obscene that is not pornographic?” (153, 156).

2 It is a basic assumption of trauma theory that historical, literary, and filmed narratives function analogously to survivor testimonies: gaps, inconsistencies, and repetitions are understood as acting out as form what cannot (and should not) be articulated as content. This assumption has been subject to a growing body of criticism. Naomi Mandel, for instance, argues that trauma theory’s “rhetoric of the unspeakable” functions primarily as a strategy of moral absolution: One distances oneself from historical atrocities – and by extension contemporary ones – by claiming it is impossible to talk about them at all (225). See also Linda Bellau’s argument that the breakdown of signification has a signifier (n. pag.).
representational and moral limits as physical feeling or sentiment. This essay will demonstrate how a particular image of the body emerged during the years following the war as both symbol and symptom of the sheer statistical immensity of genocide, a way of simultaneously evoking and turning away from the mass aspects of mass murder by figuring violence as an intimate transgression or crime of passion. The essay uses films and novels from both the United States and other countries to demonstrate that the use of the body to represent the un-representable is an international phenomenon.

In the Holocaust narratives explored in this essay obscenity at once represents and masks “bare life” as naked desire. The suffering body may or may not be heroic but it is always iconic, evoking the contradictions of viewing (we do not want to look but we must) in the dance of compulsion and desire. The passionate inflection of this representational style has more to do with the “guilty” quality of looking than with the facts of genocidal violence. Because of the central importance of the act of looking this essay will emphasize filmed narratives, although for reasons of space the “visual” as such will remain under-theorized in this account. The essay will begin by exploring how the eroticized body of the victim is linked to pornographic representational styles in the Israeli novel *House of Dolls*, then proceed to explore how forced prostitution and female nudity become figures for comparing genocide to American racism in both the novel and film of *The Pawnbroker*. An analysis of Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter* will illustrate how pornographic representational styles threaten the distinction between perpetrator and victim, while figuring a viewing position that can be characterized as guilty pleasure; and a comparison of it with Lina Wertmuller’s *Seven Beauties* will explore the impact of the gendering of spectator and spectacle on the “desirability” of viewing. The essay will turn finally to *Sophie’s Choice*, the novel and the film, as both the culmination and reversal of obscene narrative strategies. The film and the novel each differ from their predecessors in not figuring compulsion as sexual liberation. By focusing on a tormented mother, *Sophie’s Choice* represents compulsion, and by extension compelled eroticism, as offering only false freedom or a “choiceless choice” that forever damns the victim. This genealogy will demonstrate the contention that Holocaust pornography constitutes an early version of trauma theory, acting out as passion what would be described by more recent theorists as symptom.

Caroline Picart and David Frank argue that Holocaust films are like horror films in the way they “separate the viewer psychologically from monsters” while at the same time allowing the audience “the guilty pleasure of viewing their acts on the female body while absolving them of responsibility” (140). We disagree with their view that eroticism absolves the viewer of responsibility. To the contrary we argue that feeling in this context takes the place of understanding. The issue is not moral but memorial.
Obscenity is not only the first blush of trauma theory, it marks the emergence of memory in historical discourse, or what is now called “second hand” or “prosthetic memory” (Landsberg).

House of Dolls (1953) is one of the most troubling of all Holocaust novels, and it anticipates many conventions used in subsequent novels and films. The author – whose Hebrew name is Yehiel Dinur – signed himself as Ka-Tzetnik 135633, including in his nom de plume the number tattooed on his arm at Auschwitz. Having settled in Israel after the war, Dinur became well known outside that country in 1961 when he testified reluctantly at the Eichmann trial. While on the witness stand recalling his experiences in the concentration camp he underwent a complete emotional collapse and had to be carried out of the courtroom, an event that was captured by television cameras. As Ka-Tzetnik 135633 Dinur had become an Israeli celebrity because of his narratives of the ghettos and camps. In House of Dolls a beautiful teenage girl named Daniella Preleshnik (based on Dinur’s sister) is forced to serve as a prostitute for German soldiers on their way to the Russian front, thereby becoming a type of the beautiful victim.

The structure of House of Dolls anticipates many Holocaust narratives and testimonies – moving from the disruption of life in an original town or city, to isolation in a ghetto, to concentration in a camp. The story of Daniella is balanced against that of her brother Harry, who is appointed as the camp “medic,” even though he has not completed medical training. Each sibling ironically occupies a favored position among prisoners: more food than other inmates, better clothing, and a job that is not immediately life-threatening. Daniella’s prisoner number is tattooed above her breast beneath the name “Feld-hure,” which describes her camp function. Although the story it tells is powerful, House of Dolls is not a work of high literary quality. Omer Bartov characterizes it as a unique combination of “kitsch, sadism, and what initially appears as outright pornography, with remarkable and at times quite devastating insights into the reality of Auschwitz, the fantasies it both engendered and was ruled by, and the human condition under the most extreme circumstances imaginable” (189). The book enjoyed an uneasy but wide popularity in Israel during the early years of statehood because of its detailed accounts of the camps and the quasi-pornographic style of its descriptions. In the 1950s and 1960s Israeli youngsters often read Ka-Tzetnik because he was the only legitimate

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3 Isabel Kershner corroborates Bartov’s claims in a recent article: “It was one of Israel’s dirty little secrets. In the early 1960s, as Israelis were being exposed for the first time to the shocking testimonies of Holocaust survivors at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a series of pornographic pocket books called Stalags, based on Nazi themes, became best sellers throughout the land.” And later, “The books told perverse tales of captured American or British pilots being abused by sadistic female SS officers outfitted with whips and boots. The plot usually ended with the male protagonists taking revenge, by raping and killing their tormentors” (A4).
source of sexually titillating and sadistic literature in a still puritanical and closed society, with the result that the Holocaust somehow became enmeshed in their minds with both repelling and fascinating pornographic images (Bartov 203).

It is acknowledged by historians that hundreds of women were forced to work in brothels at several concentration camps. A 2007 exhibit at the Ravensbrück Memorial Museum has documented this history. In a photograph by the Israeli photographer Paul Goldman (who emigrated from Hungary in 1940) an Auschwitz survivor bears the tattoo “Feldhure” on her chest. There is an ongoing historical debate over how frequently Jewish women were forced to act as sex slaves in concentration camps, because such usage would have contradicted the Nazi doctrine of racial purity. However, the issue at stake in Dinur’s narrative is not historical accuracy in the narrowly defined sense but the impact of historical events in terms of psychological force. House of Dolls represents mass murder as forced prostitution, and it evokes this force through its impact on the individual bodies of victims and spectators. The female victims are forced to “perform,” the other prisoners are compelled to watch, and Dinur and his readers end up confronting mass murder through the titillation of pornographic narrative.

In House of Dolls the women of Daniella’s group are allowed no more than three “reports” on their behavior, reflecting either infractions of the pleasure unit’s rules or expressions of dissatisfaction from their “clients.” After a third report, the guilty party is publicly beaten to death by the lesbian Kapo Elsa in a procedure she calls “purification.” The soldiers can dismiss the stigma of contact with the victims of forced prostitution through the knowledge that these women will not survive. And they are right. After months of working in the “pleasure barracks,” Daniella deliberately walks into an area near the camp fence where prisoner access is forbidden, letting herself be shot by a guard in a calculated act of suicide. Her brother does survive, but barely, watching people he is supposed to help be reduced to the walking dead. In both cases, Ka-Tzetnik demonstrates the sadistic ingenuity by which the Nazis destroyed their victims before killing them and the impact of this cruelty on victims and witnesses (Daniella’s brother sees her forced to perform in an orgy, and the shame she endures over this incident leads indirect-


5 The Goldman photograph was displayed as part of the retrospective “Hommage an Paul Goldman. Fotografische Arbeiten 1943-1965,” exhibited at the Jewish Museum Vienna in the Museum am Judenplatz from 15 May to 19 August 2007. An archived description of the retrospective is available on the museum website at: http://www.jmw.at/de/paul_goldman.html.
ly to her suicide). The pornographic descriptions suggest the compulsive nature of Dinur’s disturbed recollections, but they also stage dehumanization as a form of arousal that, paradoxically, is difficult to distinguish from the destruction of individuality. Susan Sontag has explored this phenomenon in her essay “Fascinating Fascism.” As readers we are in the position of Daniella’s brother, compelled to read/watch but losing some of our humanity as a result. This describes the equally paradoxical experience of second- and third-generation Israeli immigrants who were obsessed by thoughts of their ancestors’ destruction.

It is not clear whether Edward Lewis Wallant read *House of Dolls* before writing *The Pawnbroker* (1961), although an American translation was available as early as 1955. In this novel Wallant, not himself a survivor, writes about one who has started his life over by running a pawnshop in New York City, after witnessing his wife forced to work as a prostitute much like Daniella Preleshnik before she died in a camp. In the novel as well as in Sidney Lumet’s film, the sexual violation of the female victim is crucial to the story. *The Pawnbroker* (1964) is the first major American film to place the Holocaust, in the form of survivor trauma, within the context of everyday life. The film uses the Shoah to mount a critique of racism as well as economic and social inequality in 1960s New York City (Spanish Harlem). It was, not coincidentally, the first Hollywood feature film since adoption of the Hays Code to show frontal female nudity, of both a black prostitute who is trying to sell herself to Sol Nazerman, the film’s damaged protagonist, and of Nazerman’s wife, whom Sol recalls in a flashback being forced to have sex in a camp brothel with an SS officer.

The film’s pervasive use of montage begins at the start with a flashback in slow motion and without dialogue that takes Nazerman (Rod Steiger) back to his days as a young philosophy professor in Germany (in the novel he is from Poland). Other flashbacks use jump cuts that last but a second or two to rend the narrative fabric and shock the viewer. This montage enables Lumet to convey the past’s wrenching recurrence in the mind of the post-traumatic survivor. Nazerman is determined to ignore the past and its effect on him. Because the Nazis destroyed his family and tortured him for the sake of a racist stereotype, he has decided to enact his own stereotype of the “stingy Jewish businessman.” In the blindness of his compensatory behavior he does not realize that by using his shop to launder money for a local racketeer and pimp he is, in effect, supporting prostitution, thus allying himself with criminals like those who had turned his wife into a sex slave. Lumet’s decision to make the film in black and white instead of color emphasizes the grittiness of the theme and the Spanish Harlem setting.

Alan Mintz argues that this film reflects a “comparativist” approach to the Holocaust, by emphasizing the continuities between various forms of social oppression; the “excep-
tionalist” argument, by contrast, denies the possibility of historical comparison (39-40, 125). By juxtaposing through flashbacks the naked black prostitute with the naked Jewish victim of sexual assault, the film emphasizes the point of contact between the two forms of repression. In the moral force of the film’s critique, racial rape in the camps becomes analogous to prostitution in a racist society. This comparison is effected through sequential images of female nudity and prostitution which are, as already mentioned, unprecedented in films of this period.

The novel only indirectly compares Sol’s wife and the prostitute. The more important relationship is between Sol and his wife. Wallant underscores this in two ways. First, the racketeer who is Nazerman’s silent partner (Italian in the novel; in the film a gay African-American) forces the barrel of his gun into Sol’s mouth in an act that mirrors the fellatio he is forced to watch his wife Ruth perform on an SS officer (Wallant 163, 169). Second, when Ruth sees Sol watching her, she is “able to award him the tears of forgiveness” (169). These tears foreshadow a kind of Christian forgiveness that he achieves at the conclusion of the novel, after his assistant Jesus Ortiz has placed himself in front of a bullet meant for Sol: “he realized he was crying for all his dead now, that all the damned-up weeping had been released by the loss of one irreplaceable negro who had been his assistant and who had tried to kill him but who had ended by saving him” (278).

It is hardly a coincidence that Sol’s assistant is named Jesus or that Nazerman is similar to “Nazareth.” Sol now recognizes the common humanity he shares with the underprivileged of Harlem, but the thrust of the narrative – and the last word of the novel – draws attention to Sol’s damaged ability to “mourn” (279).

Lumet’s film, however, emphasizes the impossibility of mourning, or the impossibility to ever complete mourning, and embodies this unending sadness in compulsive behavior. There is no reconciliation here, even after the young Jesus has in effect sacrificed himself for his Jewish employer. In the penultimate scene, Sol impales his hand on a spike used for receipts, in a gesture not included in the novel, thereby taking on the stigmata for Jesus’s death. He opens his mouth to scream, in a pose that seems a reference to Edvard Munch’s famous painting, but nothing comes out and the only sound we hear is the wail of a trumpet. The last shot, a wide-angle view of the pawnshop’s Harlem corner, leaves Sol wandering through the streets alone, emphasizing his inability to mourn.

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6 Lillian Kremer sees Sol’s affirmation of human community as consistently strong throughout the novel: “Nazerman’s response to the Ortiz sacrifice is consistent with his current social restoration, which is characterized by movement from self-willed isolation to engagement. Because Sol’s self-imposed withdrawal is the result of Holocaust trauma, so too an instinctively generous act confirms his recommitment when he elects to risk his life by defying a Harlem gangster on behalf of an underclass prostitute” (79). While our reading of Sol’s character is less optimistic, we also see a return to community in his response to Jesus Ortiz’s death in the novel.
or reintegrate himself in the community. The film also emphasizes Sol’s anhedonic inability to desire, explained by his being forced to watch his wife’s brutalization. But Sol’s spectatorship creates an alibi for our own. Viewers can safely enjoy the film’s frontal nudity by imagining that they, like Sol, are being “forced” to watch. Compulsion, in other words, serves the purposes of denial by “screening” viewers from their own desire. A central series of juxtaposed images – this time not flashbacks – represents Jesus Ortiz making passionate love to his girlfriend, the prostitute who approaches Sol, along with Sol making indifferent love to the widow of Rubin, a friend who threw himself on the electrified wire at the camp in a gesture similar to Daniella’s. It is clearly Ortiz with whom the audience is encouraged to identify. Although his character is flawed, illustrated by his involvement in a plot to rob the pawnshop, his ultimate sacrifice is passionate and heroic. He lays down his life for the damaged survivor, who has by this time become an object of pity. We leave the film thinking we should help Sol by being more like Jesus – passionate, and aroused to understanding problems of historical injustice. The desire that is a form of paradoxical and dehumanized transgression in _House of Dolls_ here takes on the trappings of activism, but it remains elegiac in the way it functions to compensate for the impossibility of mourning.

Of all the films discussed in this essay, _The Night Porter_ (1973) is the most classically sadistic. Such issues as control, submission, seduction, performance, torture, and obsession are all at play in this troubling, controversial work. Liliana Cavani’s casting of Charlotte Rampling (as Lucia) and Dirk Bogarde (as Max) continues the work they had done in Luchino Visconti’s _The Damned_. In that film Rampling played the part of Elisabeth, a doomed and beautiful member of the von Essenbeck family (who resemble the Krupps), who was married to an anti-fascist and, because of this, was transported to Dachau where she died. Bogarde (as Friedrich Bruckmann), playing Macbeth to his lover Sophie von Essenbeck, murders his way to become head of the firm only to be dispatched by the depraved son and heir Martin von Essenbeck, who forces Friedrich and Sophie to commit suicide. In _The Night Porter_ Rampling’s character Lucia is also transported to a camp where she meets Max, one of the SS staff stationed there, who turns her into his sex slave. It is there that they begin the sadomasochistic relationship which they resume in Vienna twelve years after the war’s end.

During the film’s present time (1957) Max is working as the night porter in an elegant, though fading Vienna hotel. He is active in a group of unrepentant Nazis who meet regularly at the hotel where they conduct mock trials of one another to insure that they are not in danger of being exposed. Early in the film Lucia and her husband check into Max’s hotel. She is married to a well-known American musician who is conducting Mozart that week at the opera house. (In one scene Max attends _The Magic Flute_.) When
Max checks them in, he and Lucia exchange long glances of recognition, and it is here that Cavani begins her frequent use of flashbacks that become our connection to the past. We watch Lucia standing in a line of naked prisoners being processed into a camp. Looking through the lens of a movie camera, Max gazes at Lucia closely in a gesture that immediately objectifies her and calls into question the viewer’s position. From that point on we experience the development of their erotic connection through a series of such scenes from the past.

In one extraordinary moment – during the film’s most frequently cited episode – Max asks Lucia to re-enact what he acknowledges as Salome’s dance before King Herod. In a squalid night club constructed at the camp, a simulacrum that recalls The Kit-Kat Club in Cabaret, Lucia dances for a cast of people dressed in a variety of costumes, including men with faces painted a deathly white, as well as a nearly nude male dancer; all of this is reminiscent of Weimar decadence. Wearing only boots, slacks, suspenders, and gloves, with an SS death’s-head cap slanted at an angle, Lucia sings a sultry torch song. Her almost cadaverous body seems boyish and lascivious, suggesting the anorexia of a fashion model rather than the starvation of a prisoner. In the Wilde-Strauss version of Salome Herod becomes so inflamed that when the dancing Salome peels off her seven veils he says she can have whatever she desires. She asks for John the Baptist’s head, a wish Herod reluctantly grants, and when presented with the head the depraved Salome kisses it on the lips, at which point an appalled Herod condemns her to death.

Cavani’s version has Max, already besotted and associating Lucia with Salome, preparing the head in advance. He has done this as a favor, because the head he presents belonged to a male prisoner about whom Lucia had once complained. When she opens the box that contains her “present” Lucia expresses a barely disguised shock; then her face relaxes into her familiar dissociated smile, a facial gesture she has clearly not shed when she meets Max again twelve years after the war. This psychic strategy is Lucia’s mode of survival, and while it has helped her get through the war, it also leads her back to her destructive relationship with Max. Does Cavani intend to warn the viewer, through her erotic portrayal of the victim, against our own seduction by the Nazi past? Or does Lucia’s inability to escape the past serve as an alibi, allowing viewers to approach the concentration camps erotically through the safe distance of the decade between Lucia’s initial camp experiences and her repetition compulsion? However we answer these questions, it is clear that the “return of the repressed” that would become a key feature of trauma theory, is here one of the core elements of eroticism. Repetition is the structure of compulsive desire, the figure of obscene proximity to the past, and the mechanism that enables voyeurism but also implicates viewers in the re-enactment of historical events.
One of the troubling aspects of the film is its tendency to represent Max as a victim of his own passions. Given the film’s tendency to represent victimization in terms of the intensity of experience – the feature it shares with all of the films and texts we are discussing – it tends to blur the lines between Max and Lucia, perpetrator and victim. They both, after all, feel intensely. With Lucia becoming the object of his gaze and ours, the viewer is put in the uncomfortable position of identifying with Max’s perversions, sexual and, by extension, political. What might also offend many viewers, however, is not just the attraction Max feels for Lucia, but the obsession with him that she reciprocates. Cavani is willing to portray the victim as also being complicit, the masochist inextricably involved with the sadist. The two characters become so enmeshed that Max abandons his hotel and Lucia declines to join her husband on his conducting tour. When the doomed couple moves to Max’s apartment, they are effectively imprisoned by the band of Nazis who perceive in Max’s obsession the possibility of their own exposure. This enforced isolation leaves the couple to play out their sadomasochistic roles on a stage where only fantasy matters, theirs and the viewer’s.

Cavani complicates matters in a number of ways. She lets us watch acts of mutual tenderness and lovemaking that are not coerced. She slows the film’s tempo so much that we seem to be watching the tormented characters starve to death, with their food supply cut off. But she also manipulates the viewer by many sensuous shots that tend both to arouse and repulse. The Night Porter’s eroticism, typical in most ways of films from that period, nonetheless encourages viewers to identify with victims – or at least to “feel” them in terms of passion, which is tantamount to “feeling their pain,” an emphasis more characteristic of films in the 1990s, such as Schindler’s List. Also, in the uncomfortable relationship it establishes between Max and the viewers, The Night Porter has the potential to make viewers question the nature of their interest in the Holocaust, an interest refigured here as another form of sadomasochism. Caroline Picart and David Frank have argued that the “pleasure” elicited by “the spectacle of the vulnerable, eroticized female body” in The Night Porter actually mystifies the facts of the Holocaust: “The use of soft-porn techniques creates a sentimental idyll between victimized victimizer and utter victim against the backdrop of Nazi brutality” (138). However, the compulsion to watch is not exclusively a distancing mechanism: it also implicates us in the victim’s and victimizer’s fate.

In the closing scene, when their fate is inevitable, the starving couple leaves the apartment to take Max’s car for a final ride. Lucia is wearing a short dress that makes her look like a girl; Max has put on his old SS uniform. They ride to the middle of a bridge over the Danube and get out of the car. We know they have been followed. Single shots ring out a few seconds apart and each of them drops to the ground. In the background we
see a large cathedral; but we do not see the shooter. Given the repetition compulsion that drives this narrative, from which there can be no escape, the shooter might very well be the camera itself (recalling Max’s first camera-view of his victim), and the perpetrators those who want to “film” or watch the show (like the cabaret in the concentration camp) to its bitter end. This has clearly been a suicide, though not entirely voluntary, and the film ends much as did Visconti’s The Damned. The mutually corrupted couple has been coerced into choosing death, and we, in a sense, are in the position of Herod, demanding their heads after watching the striptease. In this way the film suggests that the pleasure of eroticism is a “guilty” one. By pursuing pornographic representational strategies to their logical conclusion, The Night Porter blurs the line between perpetrator and victim and completely de-historicizes the Holocaust; but it also implicates the viewer in this process, making us confront the perpetration of “mere” watching at the end. This uncomfortable feeling distinguishes memory from history not only in the film, but the more recent discourse of trauma theory.

Emboldened perhaps by her countrywoman’s willingness to defy Holocaust taboos, Lena Wertmüller uses humor to represent surviving in her classic black comedy, Seven Beauties (1975). For her work on this film Wertmüller was the first woman to be nominated as Best Director by Hollywood’s Academy, although there were also strong objections to the film, most notably Bruno Bettelheim’s.7 Wertmüller did not win the Oscar, but she established herself as someone who was willing to take up unfashionable positions, particularly on feminist issues, as in other works such as Swept Away and All Screwed Up. While there are differences between Cavani’s melodramatic and Wertmüller’s darkly comic methods, both directors force a confrontation with our fascination with images of the pornographic and obscene.

Why do we look? Conventional wisdom has long believed that it is men who find voyeurism to be a stimulus to desire. Classic feminist theory suggests that certain representational techniques eliciting the “gaze” are coded as heterosexual and masculine by being typically directed towards certain objects. Women may enjoy looking as much as men, but the gaze itself is “masculine” by virtue of its structure.8 Whatever the gender and sexuality of the filmic gaze, it is nonetheless the case that two of the most powerful-ly voyeuristic feature films have been directed by women. Were these films made primarily for a male, heterosexual audience, or are their images directed equally to all viewers? The Night Porter does demonstrate the obvious truth that men in power frequently force women to perform acts of sexual submission, but it also reformulates sub-

7 See Bettelheim, “Surviving.”
8 See Laura Mulvey’s essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), a classic statement of that position.
mission as a type of complicity that is likely to strike contemporary viewers as blaming and/or eroticizing the victim.

In *Seven Beauties* Wertmüller deliberately reverses the conventional stereotypes. The film features a “comic-strip ‘Godfather’” (Innsdorf 62) named Pasqualino, but nicknamed Seven Beauties because he has seven sisters who are decidedly not beautiful (the Italian title is *Pasqualino Settebellezze*). Pasqualino (played by Giancarlo Giannini) struts around Naples, indulged by his family, while his mother and most of his sisters work at stuffing mattresses. Another sister sings outrageously in a seedy cabaret and has a pimp. Pasqualino challenges the pimp in a hilarious defense of family honor and shoots him accidentally. In a panic he dismembers the body, puts the parts in suitcases, and takes them to the train station. Pasqualino is eventually caught, tried for murder, and sent to a hospital for the criminally insane where he molests women. At a certain point during the war he is freed on condition that he joins the Italian army. Clearly not much of a soldier, he manages to become separated from his unit. When Pasqualino and a fellow deserter come near a group of Jews stripped naked and standing by a pit, they watch German soldiers shoot the Jews dead, while the soundtrack plays “The Ride of the Valkyries.” By this point in the war Italy has ceased to be an ally of the Third Reich, and so when Pasqualino is captured by the Germans he is taken to a concentration camp where the Commandant (Shirley Stoller) is a fiercely unattractive woman. This break in historical accuracy—no camp commandants were women—allows Wertmüller to invert the sadomasochistic gender stereotypes typical of this genre, with the man taking on the masochistic role and without breaking the heterosexual paradigm of desire.

Now dressed in the striped pajamas of a prisoner, Pasqualino decides that his survival requires him to seduce the Commandant. He deliberately flirts with her to save his life. Stoller has characterized the Commandant to be as unappealing as possible. Obese, asexual, and uninviting, she is as austere a Nazi as film convention allows. Responding to Pasqualino’s invitation sadistically, she offers food in order to nourish him for his sexual performance, putting a plate (with no utensils) on the floor to make him eat like a dog. It is from the Commandant’s point of view that we watch Pasqualino eat, waiting, as she does, for him to finish: “First we eat,” she says, “then we fuck.” When it is time for him to act we see the Commandant from Pasqualino’s point of view. The representation is deliberately anti-erotic. The expression on the Commandant’s face indicates her complete dismissal of Pasqualino, whose face in turn is marked by anxiety and despair. If he cannot achieve sexual success, he knows he will die.

We can best understand this representation of the anti-erotic by comparing it to the more conventionally pornographic strategies of the other texts and films we have been discussing. We are not encouraged to empathize with the victim by desiring him, but
rather to recoil from his being forced to perform for a figure of power. Wertmüller’s inversion of masculine and feminine roles, and her banishment of the erotic, moves the film from the pornographic register to the grotesque, while raising the question of guilt vis-à-vis the viewer. Pasqualino – petty criminal, pimp, and molester of women – was never innocent. However, his desperate ploy makes his guilt more obvious. The terms of Pasqualino’s survival, after “seducing” the Commandant, mean that he must do as he is ordered, and that means he must choose which of his fellow prisoners will die. In a scene that implicates the viewer once again, Pasqualino is commanded to shoot his friend Francesco. He hesitates, Francesco pleads with him to do it, and in the moment before Pasqualino pulls the trigger we are forced to ask ourselves what we might have done in his place.

Pasqualino’s desperate acts of self-preservation are worlds apart from Lucia’s accepting, without requesting, the head of a fellow prisoner. If the naked female figure offers reassurances especially for the male viewer, transforming bare life into naked desire, then Pasqualino materializes and inverts, in his abject masculinity, the gender and agency of this gaze. When the war is over, we see Pasqualino return home to find his mother, his sisters, and his fiancée working as prostitutes. They have survived the war and seem prosperous. American soldiers are in Naples offering cigarettes. But Pasqualino is deeply embittered. What price has he paid to survive? What would we have done in his place? How far would we be willing to degrade ourselves in order to live? Are we all potentially prostitutes? Or even worse, are we “johns” like the Commandant or the American soldiers with their cigarettes?

Wertmüller’s comedy forces us to confront these questions by inverting conventional pornographic representations of the Holocaust. By making the female body monstrous and the male protagonist the one who is forced to trade sex for survival, *Seven Beauties* turns guilty pleasure into complicit disgust. The viewing experience becomes as monstrous as Pasqualino’s survival. Just as Pasqualino “deserves” the Commandant, she deserves the “dog” she has turned him into, and we deserve to watch the spectacle of their mutual debasement. As a critique of the films that preceded it, *Seven Beauties* employs a pornographic representational strategy to criticize the voyeuristic and exploitative nature of narrative cinema. The film attempts, like its predecessors, to represent the unrepresentable through obscenity, but this is an obscenity having less to do with desire for the victims than with the viewer’s abject proximity to victims and perpetrators alike.

Both William Styron’s novel (1979) and Alan Pakula’s film (1982) of *Sophie’s Choice* contain another complex variation on the issue of survivor and victim, which ends in yet another version of abjection. In this story the ostensible victimized woman is not a Jew but a blonde Polish woman, Sophie Zawistowska, who lost her two children at
Auschwitz and has come to the United States, like Sol Nazerman, to re-start her life. She is now involved with a Jewish man, Nathan Landau, an American who was not in the camps but who identifies strongly with those Jews who had been victims in Europe. He has a large library of books concerning the war and the Jews, and much like the author Binjamin Wilkomirski would later do, he uses the Holocaust as a way of giving structure to his troubled psyche. The relationship of Sophie and Nathan is constituted by a passionate mixture of sexual desire and mutual torment, with each one taking a turn as victim or tormentor. Styron has taken advantage of two facts: 1) while almost three million (out of over 3.2 million) Polish Jews died during the Holocaust, more than three million (out of approximately 30 million) non-Jewish Poles were also killed; and 2) many Poles collaborated with the Nazi occupiers in killing Jews (Niewyk and Nicosia 24, 49).

Styron uses a conventional literary device to maintain some distance from Sophie’s and Nathan’s madness: a first-person narrator who is heavily involved in the story but is not one of the “main” characters – in the tradition of Melville’s Ishmael, Conrad’s Marlow, and Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway. With the declaration “Call Me Stingo” the narrator announces his connection to this narrative line by echoing the opening words of *Moby-Dick*. Stingo (played by Peter MacNichol) is a young Southerner just graduated from the university, who has come to New York City to write the Great American Novel – much like a young William Styron. The year is 1947, a time when the war remains a fresh memory, and when Freud’s theories of repression and sexuality were part of every intellectual’s vocabulary; but it is well over a decade before the United States is to experience a corresponding sexual liberation. Stingo reflects this situation with his constant libidinal longings (he is twenty-two), which take up many pages in the novel but which we are spared in Pakula’s trimmed-down version of the narrative (he wrote the script as well as directed). In the apartment house where he lives, Stingo occupies the flat just below Sophie (Meryl Streep) and Nathan (Kevin Kline), and he is often kept awake by their enthusiastic lovemaking. Stingo quickly becomes infatuated with Sophie, feelings that are complicated by his close friendship with Nathan.

Sophie’s torments have a number of sources, but they arise mostly from the “choice” she was forced to make when arriving at Auschwitz. The doctor who interrogated her gave her the unimaginable ultimatum to decide which of her children would not be “selected.” We hear this story only toward the end of both narratives, when Sophie confesses to Stingo that under duress she chose to save her son only to watch a guard carry off her screaming daughter. Because her son also did not survive, her choice ultimately made no difference; most children died at Auschwitz. But the experience of making such a decision has scarred her badly. We know that Sophie drinks heavily and is subject to mood swings. What we do not realize at first is that she constantly lies about her past.
For instance, she characterizes her father as a man who was friendly to Jews during the occupation; but it turns out that he was a violent anti-Semite who wrote a book about the “Jewish problem” in Poland – a book Sophie had typed before the war. As Daniel Schwartz points out in *Imagining the Holocaust*, Sophie’s impossible choice was not only about which child to save but also about what to tell Stingo and Nathan; her telling is shaped by and repeats her trauma (201). In a series of flashbacks, filmed by Pakula in sepia instead of color to indicate past time as well as their different order in reality, Sophie relates her experiences in wartime Poland and in Auschwitz as someone who worked with the Resistance as well as in the household of Camp Commandant Rudolf Höss. In these flashbacks her rhetoric is simpler and more straightforward than Stingo’s, which lends credibility to her stories even when she is lying.

Nathan Landau also creates a past to fit his needs. He tells Stingo he has a masters’ degree in biology and works in a laboratory on experiments of great importance; but he is in fact a paranoid schizophrenic who uses recreational drugs instead of the medicinal ones needed to control his problems. In the laboratory where he is employed he is little more than a file clerk and an occasional librarian who retains his job through the intervention of his brother, an influential doctor. Nathan is also subject to angry fits of jealousy about Sophie, particularly with regard to Stingo, and his personal Holocaust library (an anachronism given the 1947 setting) affords him the narrative structure to play the Jewish victim, on occasion, to Sophie’s Polish perpetrator. He calls her, in one of his violent moments, a “Polish whore,” which causes Stingo to defend her and exacerbate the tension among them. It is the kind of accusation that Nathan makes in order to justify his paranoia, but it is also one that Sophie needs to hear in order to objectify her guilt.

Following his most irrational outburst to date, Nathan disappears and Sophie leaves New York with Stingo, who now gets to act as her rescuer. In recompense for his desire, Sophie finally grants Stingo his sexual initiation, which in the book contains the tremulous overreaction one might expect of an adolescent, but which is more muted on the screen. What seems transformative to Stingo is for Sophie more like the granting of a favor or the payment of a debt. By juxtaposing this episode with Sophie’s revelation of her secret, the film (and also the novel) deliberately links sexual exchange with testimony – a point we will return to in a moment. Stingo and the viewers get to “know” the truth of Sophie’s past, and the horror of the concentration camps, through his long-awaited experience of her body. *Sophie’s Choice*, as both novel and film, may be the ultimate version of pornographic representational strategy: in it the Holocaust becomes a sexual “attraction” that initiates the boy into manhood and artistic maturity. (What the Meryl Streep character thinks about this may be suggested by her consistent mispronunciation of his nickname as the vulgarity “Stinko.”) Leaving Stingo a note, Sophie makes
her suicidal return to Nathan. In the final scene Stingo has returned to their Brooklyn neighborhood to witness the two dead lovers in a back-to-front embrace.

The film is critical of Stingo’s role but also guilty of what it criticizes – turning the victim into an object of desire. (We are encouraged to eroticize Streep’s Sophie, but we do so at our own peril, turning into “Stinko” when we do.) It is, nonetheless, something like a final statement in the sadomasochistic paradigm of Holocaust representation, with the fake victim (Jewish American) turning the real victim (in this case, Polish Catholic), who is also a perpetrator (because of her “choiceless choice” and because of the work she did with her father), into the oppressor she never really was. Nathan’s suicide is also Sophie’s murder. He has succeeded in destroying the only survivor he knew well, by taking his murderous self-loathing and turning it toward Sophie. He makes her his victim by pretending to be the victim he never was, and he justifies his own destruction by incorporating hers into his.

The death of the non-Jewish victim, a result of Jewish “victim envy,” embodies what some critics consider the most objectionable feature of the story. Cynthia Ozick’s pre-publication criticism of the novel, “A Liberal’s Auschwitz,” set the tone of a line of a critique that has been recapitulated by D.G. Myers. According to Myers, “Styron vigorously criticizes Jewish scholars and writers for [a] ‘narrow’ and specifically Jewish interpretation [of the Holocaust]. In its stead he advances a universalist, even metaphysical interpretation, understanding the Holocaust as the embodiment of absolute evil, which threatened humanity as a whole” (500). Styron, in other words, sought to show that non-Jews suffered too, a universalizing perspective which, positively expressed, makes the Holocaust the property of everyone, but negatively expressed, denies the specificity of Jewish victimization, thereby perpetuating, in a liberal fashion, the “erasure” of Judaism also implicit in the Nazi ideology of a “pure” state. The universalizing perspective is, as we have pointed out, typical of those representational paradigms focusing on passion and the body. It is perhaps more muted in the film than the book because of Streep’s previous performance as Inga Helms Weiss in Holocaust, the TV miniseries. (Streep’s character there is Christian, but she is married to a Jew).

This is not the place to enter the debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust. However, it is worth noting that Styron’s universalizing gesture, the subject of so much

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5 For a brief but thorough account of the critical reception of Styron’s novel see Bryan Cheyette’s “Liberal Anti-Judaism and the Victims of Modernity.” Alvin Rosenthal makes an argument especially relevant to our purposes: “By reducing the war against the Jews to a sexual combat, [Styron] has misappropriated Auschwitz and used it as little more than the erotic centerpiece of a new Southern Gothic Novel” (165). See also Eric J. Sundquist’s expansion of this argument in the context of Polish memorial culture that Styron would have been familiar with from a visit to Auschwitz and Styron’s ongoing preoccupation with Nat Turner: “What is most pornographic...is not the graphic detail of Stingo’s escapades with Sophie but rather Styron’s attempt to endow them, in the context of the Final Solution, with sacrificial, redemptive significance” (122).

10 See D.G. Myers’ article for a summary of the arguments in favor of Holocaust uniqueness. See also Mintz’s comparison of Holocaust “exceptionalism” to “constructivism” (38 ff.). Alan Rosenbaum’s edited volume Is the Holocaust Unique? contains important perspectives on both sides of the debate.
criticism, depends on both the clearest dramatization of the erotic paradigm that has always served comparativist ends, and also on its ultimate transformation. The passionate experience in Sophie’s Choice is a trope for both the spectacle of violence and for the transmission of memory which, significantly, destroys the survivor. There are two transgressions here: the first, which we have already analyzed, involves showing what should not be shown (pornography), the second acts out what cannot be said (memory as symptom). Sophie’s unnecessary death becomes the figure of her impossible choice, and while it may answer the guilt she feels in her own psyche, it remains inexplicable to Stingo, who is nevertheless left to “bear witness.” He bears witness because of his emotional and erotic investment in Sophie, and because of the unwitting role he may have played in the reenactment of her trauma, i.e., necessitating her secondary “choice” between Nathan and himself.

But what choice does Sophie have? The “choiceless” nature of her choice, to borrow Lawrence Langer’s terminology, marks the other aspect of Styron/Pakula’s universalizing strategy, namely replacing the eroticized victim with the more troubling paradigm of the tormented mother. Sophie’s breakdown makes her ultimately less a potentially desirable body than an extra-moral entity, forced outside the bounds of conventional morality because of her own impossible decision. Langer says the “choiceless choice” is the result of the extreme situation of the concentration camps, “where critical decisions did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of abnormal response and another, both imposed by a situation that in no way was of the victim’s own choosing” (72). Such situations make heroic actions, and even conventional morality, impossible. Because of this, Langer urges us to become sensitive to the conflicts and contradictions in survivor narratives that are characteristic of their telling. Readers and listeners must be open to feeling testimony, which Shoshana Felman vividly defines as “bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference” (5). Sophie’s Choice, perhaps because of its deliberately universalizing strategy, effects the transition from pornography’s acting out of passion to trauma theory’s reformulation of passion in terms of suffering, sympathy, and memory.

Holocaust pornography, then, is a precursor to trauma theory. One grows out of the other in the way the “choiceless choice” emerges from the eroticized victim in Sophie’s Choice. In both cases, feeling makes up for a perceived failure of representation or understanding: what pornography dramatizes as the passion of desire, trauma theory describes as the passion of pain and memory. This may represent a return to the sentimental roots of pornographic conventions, the belief – or the hope – that the spectacle of
suffering can serve some moral purpose. It is certainly a return to a powerful insight Hannah Arendt had about the camps as early as 1948. Her essay “The Concentration Camps” repeats a story told by Albert Camus the previous year (in *Twice a Year*), “of a woman in Greece, who was allowed by the Nazis to choose which among her three children should be killed” (Arendt 757). She offers the account to illustrate the principle she sees at work in concentration camps: the destruction of human beings first as juridical entities, then as moral subjects, and finally as individuals. Arendt believed that totalitarianism strove to make all individuals superfluous (761). She also predicted something that has been horribly borne out by the history of the long twentieth-century: the repeated implementation of genocide as a means of obtaining political objectives. Humanity disappears as it becomes clear that “man’s ‘nature’ is only ‘human’ in so far as it opens up to man the possibility of becoming something highly unnatural, that is, a man” (759). The unnaturalness of humanity might, after all, be the ultimate commentary on our desire to witness other people’s suffering, or empathize with it, without ever seeming to do enough to prevent it.

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Who’s Controlling My Rocket? – Order and Disorder of Guidance in American Imaginary Rocketry

Science fiction describes travel in a space rocket as a simultaneously orderly and disorderly act: the chaos of fiery power and extraordinary speed is subjected to the discipline and form of a rocket’s streamlined structure and the mathematically defined trajectory. It is no wonder, then, that when making the first feature about the Communist space quest, the Soviet filmmakers called it Taming the Fire (Wade “Taming the Fire”). In American literary rocketry, this order-disorder opposition lends itself to a paradigmatic reading, as exemplified by Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz’s article on different American literary machines. Kopcewicz compares the uses of the machine in The Education of Henry Adams, Frank Stockton’s The Great Stone of Sardis, and Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow, treating these texts as “a compound, self-reflective text” (137). The paradigmatic reading presented here will differ in the choice of texts, but it will retain two important literary landmarks of American machine imagery mentioned by Kopcewicz: Hermann Melville’s Moby Dick and Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow. The temporal and paradigmatic frame encompassing these two texts is the same here as in Kopcewicz’s article, but the present discussion follows a different thread connecting the texts, namely the theme of control over the machine. Specifically, this discussion focuses on the degree of control necessary to build a machine and make it fly safely as well as the degree of individual initiative and freedom necessary to achieve this. The control vs. initiative antinomy lead to many tensions in the imaginary American engineering, tensions which were probably most conspicuous in the field of science fiction rocketry. The choice of texts for this article runs back to “The Mast-Head” episode in Moby Dick and then proceeds to Garret Serviss’s Columbus of Space from the formative period of science fiction and Robert Bloch’s “Strange Flight of Richard Clayton” from the Golden Age. Subsequently, the discussion shifts to the post-war period, represented by Cordwainer Smith’s “Mark Elf,” a continuation of the final flight in Gravity’s Rainbow, and by James Tiptree Jr.’s “Houston, Houston, Do You Read?,” where the notions of control and initiative are manifestly related to gender.

The already “high density” of “literary criticism per unit of text” in the case of Melville’s encyclopedic narrative grows even higher in the case of “The Mast-Head,” the
thirty-fifth chapter. The reason for this has to do with the seminal discussion of the episode in Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*, where the mast-head standers, hovering above “the sublime uneventfulness” (Melville 152), become symbols of the American Adam’s ambivalent wobbling between culture and wilderness. By dint of the late twentieth-century imagination men perched on the top of long tapering structures become astronauts, who can in turn regarded as the modern mast-head standers, while their tiny capsules become the unlikely avatars of the elusive pastoral ideal of American civilization. Of course, the science-fiction aficionado, who reads *Moby Dick*, will not miss Melville’s description of Captain Sleet’s crow-nests, the cozy little compartments mounted on top of the masts/rockets. Those nests, even in their small details, resemble the interiors of space capsules:

Being fixed on the summit of the mast, you ascend into it through a little trap-hatch in the bottom. On the after side, or side next the stern of the ship, is a comfortable seat, with a locker underneath for umbrellas, comforters, and coats. In front is a leather rack, in which to keep your speaking trumpet, pipe, telescope, and other nautical conveniences. When Captain Sleet in person stood his mast-head in this crow’s-nest of his, he tells us that he always had a rifle with him (also fixed in the rack), together with a powder flask and shot, for the purpose of popping off the stray narwhales, or vagrant sea unicorns infesting those waters; for you cannot successfully shoot at them from the deck owing to the resistance of the water, but to shoot down upon them is a very different thing. Now, it was plainly a labor of love for Captain Sleet to describe, as he does, all the little detailed conveniences of his crow’s-nest; but though he so enlarges upon many of these, and though he treats us to a very scientific account of his experiments in this crow’s-nest, with a small compass he kept there for the purpose of counteracting the errors resulting from what is called the ‘local attraction’ of all binnacle magnets; an error ascribable to the horizontal vicinity of the iron in the ship’s planks, and in the Glacier’s case, perhaps, to there having been so many broken-down blacksmiths among her crew; I say, that though the Captain is very discreet and scientific here, yet, for all his learned ‘binnacle deviations,’ ‘azimuth compass observations,’ and ‘approximate errors,’ he knows very well, Captain Sleet, that he was not so much immersed in those profound magnetic meditations, as to fail being attracted occasionally towards that well replenished little case-bottle, so nicely tucked in on one side of his crow’s nest, within easy reach of his hand. (154-155)

Captain Sleet’s capsule would pass unnoticed in every science fiction text written between the early period of the genre (inaugurated by Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Unparal-
leled Adventure of Hans Pfaal”) and the 1950s, when the nest would need only a few adjustments to fit the engineering complex. The crow’s nest is equipped with the same scientific kit that sufficed for celestial navigation in early science fiction, stressing the essential link between science and white man’s survival in the universe, which is clearly indicated in the genre’s name. The fact that the inventor of the nest is a father figure (Melville compares the inventor to a father who names his child) is also significant for future rocket designs. Captain Sleet’s design is a realization of a benevolent, protective power of a parent. Of course, Melville’s warning to all “Pantheists” – and its interpretation by Leo Marx – is valid for America’s fictional astronauts, as it is perhaps for the real ones too. The mast-head, just like the space capsule, is the locus of encounter between the ultimate pioneering experience and the wilderness.

The obvious links between science fiction and the myths of Western pioneers have been discussed by many authors, including E. F. Bleiler, who tracked different self-conscious analogies between the fictional space pioneers and the less fictional Western ones in the fiction of Robert Heinlein, one of the founders of modern science fiction (251-260). This article explores the question of how much science, order, organization, and culture an author will allow to intervene between the pioneer and the wilderness, and how much of this intervention is indeed necessary to keep the pioneer. A short, twenty-first-century articulation of this question is: “who’s gonna ride your rocket?” and “will it have windows?”

For early science fiction writers, there was no doubt that the capsule was, like Sleet’s crow-nest in Moby Dick, manned by a captain, who controlled his ship even though he was perched on the top of its mast. When in an attempt to emulate Jules Verne, Garret Serviss wrote The Columbus of Space in 1893 and re-introduced space travel to American middle-brow audiences about fifty years after Poe, his capsule was, accordingly, very similar to Captain Sleet’s crow’s nest: there are leather racks with instruments and “comforters,” there are guns and pistols (automatic ones), but most importantly there is a bevy of sporting American gentlemen, who smoke cigars all the time and whose leader controls the spacecraft single-handedly and without any difficulty. Serviss’s rocket is somewhere at an initial stage of the historical process whereby literary manned space travel evolves from the disorderly flights piloted by pioneers, like Hans Pfaal’s balloon on its way to the moon, to the ordered vehicles controlled from the ground by armies of organized engineers like V2 in Pynchon’s novel.

It thus comes as no surprise that the walls of the early capsules are thin enough to allow close contact with the wilderness of cosmos, whereas the thick walls of more advanced fictional vehicles leave the astronaut blind to and unconscious of the horrible spaces toward or through which he is flying. Characteristically, the early space pioneers,
like Pfaal and like Serviss’s gentlemen, leave the earth unnoticed by other people. This is because they run away from the constraints of culture, not unlike Natty Bumppo; their flights signify furtive and secret affairs. As the literary technology of space flight progresses, the launchings of spacecraft begin to attract crowds of spectators, and later the attention of politicians and industrial potentates. With the evolution of the genre, the rockets begin to be controlled from the ground, where powerful men give orders, but some rockets continue to be piloted by the heroes, especially in comic strips of the Buck Rogers or Flash Gordon type, which leads to the hypothesis that the heroes navigate the vehicles constructed for low-brow audiences in the same manner the pioneers would ride horses, whereas the rockets constructed with greater literary sophistication are controlled from the ground and direct the reader’s attention to the problems larger than horse-riding. Several examples from the history of science fiction will show how order, associated with the ground control, is opposed to the disorderly desire to move freely in the universe.

The early space pioneers are industrious and inventive men, because only such men would face the perils of the wilderness that the pioneers of science fiction had in store for them. To use Melville’s metaphor again, at the top of an early spacecraft “There is Napoleon; who, upon the top of the column of Vendome, stands with arms folded, some one hundred and fifty feet in the air; careless, now, who rules the decks below; whether Louis Philippe, Louis Blanc, or Louis the Devil” (152). The most important trait of these gifted space travelers is their independence from society: if they do not, like Pfaal, run away from the constraints of earthly order and discipline, at least they do not have to, contrary to the later astronauts, conform to the discipline of training before the flight. Usually, the oppressive order of culture is not necessary for a safe flight and can thus be left behind. Therefore the early space flights resemble the happy and triumphant trips of Cooper’s Leatherstocking, especially those trips that come before and after the essential plots of the saga’s novels, when he no longer has to reckon with the civilized characters, their wars, their cultural goals and norms. The brilliant, independent, and unmarried gentlemen of Columbus of Space are free to explore the universe in (and along) their own way, and their exploration offers the opportunity for a close, virtually sensual contact with the perils of space.

The intimations of how this freedom was to be limited in later science fiction can be found already in Verne’s From the Earth to the Moon (1865), where the first American astronauts (invented in France) do not control their flight, because there are no controlling devices in their capsule; it flies like a bullet shot from a cannon, since it is a bullet shot from a cannon. A later idle astronaut sits in the rocket launched in March 1939 by Robert Bloch in Amazing Science Fiction Stories. Bloch’s text incidentally appeared in
the same issue with Isaac Asimov’s debut story, “Marooned off Vesta.” Decades later, in 1979, Asimov admitted that “Bob’s story was the only one in that issue which, in my eyes, was better than mine” (Asimov and Greenberg 25). Bob’s story was entitled “The Strange Flight of Richard Clayton,” and it was published in the first of the “golden years” of Amazing Stories.

Richard Clayton is confined to a small control room of his rocket, bound for a ten-year trip to Mars, but the controls are accidentally smashed during the start. The start is observed by swarming crowds, which “would leave for home and forget” (27), but there are still no government agencies involved, and the home order is represented only by the pilot’s friend. The flight is controlled automatically, so it continues safely, but with the destroyed controls, Clayton faces a nightmare of a scientific, machine-like prison:

It would take ten years to reach Mars; ten years to return…. A thousand miles an hour – not an imaginative ‘speed of light’ journey, but a slow, grim voyage, scientifically accurate. The panels were set, and Clayton had no need to guide the vessel. It was automatic.

‘But now what?’ Clayton said, staring at the shattered glass. He had lost touch with the outer world. He would be unable to read his progress on the board, unable to judge time and distance and direction. He would sit here for ten, twenty years – all alone in a tiny cabin. There had been no room for books or paper of games to amuse him. He was a prisoner in the black void of space. (27)

Clayton is not only a prisoner of the order of culture, represented by the womb of the tiny cabin, but also a prisoner of the “dark voids” of disorder behind its windowless walls. As one might expect, he gradually slips into the psychological wilderness of mental disorder, like the Western pioneers, who went mad in the estates, cabins and caverns built by Charles Brockden Brown and his followers. “This was awful. If he lost track of Time he might soon lose consciousness of identity itself. He would go mad here in the spaceship as it plunged through the void of planets beyond” (29). Clayton’s inner struggle to preserve sanity constitutes a substantial part of the plot, but at one point a long dream sequence shows his close filial affinity to the Leatherstocking; he breaks off the technological order of the rocket and makes his natural runaway into the dreamy wilderness of Mars:

Now the ship landed, and Clayton had opened the door. He broke the seals and stepped out. He bounded lightly on the purple grass. His body felt free, buoyant. There was fresh air, and the sunlight seemed stronger, more intense, although clouds veiled the glowing globe.
Far away in stood the forests, the green forests with the purple growth of the lushly-rearing trees. Clayton left the ship and approached the cool grove. The first tree had boughs that bent to the ground in two limbs. (30)

The runaway into the wilderness, however, turns out to be a dream, and Clayton, a prisoner of the machine, sinks deeper and deeper into madness with every long year of his voyage. What in Garret Serviss’s time was a sort of Western stage coach, or a comfortable crow’s nest, in 1939 becomes, probably for the first time, a dark cavern of madness, or, to return to the Pequod again, a life-preserving coffin.

Outside of science fiction, the best known follower of Richard Clayton is, arguably, the boy Gottfried, who flies in Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow, curled like a fetus in a tiny, coffin-like compartment of the V2 missile with the serial number 00000. During the flight Gottfried is entirely at the mercy of the powers which shaped and then guided him, behaviorally, to his ultimate destiny. He is, thus, an ultimate product of the organized order of civilization, and the launch is not a disorderly breakaway of the early space pioneers, but a regular ascent along a pre-calculated trajectory. Some critics, however, pointed to his residual blood-link with the rebellious kind of Leatherstocking (Cawelti 159). This link will be further discussed after determining what happened during and after Gottfried’s final flight.

Surprising as it may seem, an insight into the circumstances of Gottfried’s flight is possible. Three children, like Gottfried, fly German V2 rockets, and do so in an equally blind and helpless way, in Corwainer Smith’s fiction written in the 1950s. Smith, or Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger, whose stories are borderline cases situated on the cusp of science fiction and mythic folktale, sends three little girls, tucked in three automatic missiles, up to the Earth’s orbit, and then brings them back in his short stories “Mark Elf” and “Queen of the Afternoon.” The starts of the girls’ missiles actually precede that of the nr 00000 V2 rocket, because in Cordwainer Smith’s dreamy world they were launched from a Nazi pocket of defense in the Czech town of Pardubice early in April 1945. It is also worth mentioning that “Mark Elf” was written in 1957, sixteen years before Gravity’s Rainbow. Like Gottfried, the girls are completely at the mercy of an organization, the waning German military and scientific order, represented by their father, who launches them into space so that they can avoid rape and murder at the hands of Soviet soldiery:

She had left the screaming uproar of Hitler Germany as it fell down to ruins in its Bohemian outposts. She had obeyed her father, the Ritter vom Acht, as he passed her and her sisters into missiles which had been designed as personnel and supply carriers for the First German National Moon Base.
He and his medical brother, Professor Doctor Joachim vom Acht, had harnessed the girls securely in their missiles. Their uncle the Doctor had given them shots. Karla had gone first, then Juli, and then Charlotta. (38)

The daughters of the German scientist, brave girls indeed, are thus less unlikely sisters of Gottfried and of the Leatherstocking than one might think. Captain Sleet, the inventor of the crow’s nest, was a father figure, and Smith shows again that the relationship between the pioneer and the order which sends him, or her, into space is that between a parent and a child. However, despite all the technological constraints, the child is an embodiment of the disorderly, exploratory spirit of the mast-head stander.

Smith’s story opens when the girls return to the Earth after having orbited around the Earth for the ghastly 16,000 years, during which they neither controlled their rockets, nor experienced the black voids outside, since they were asleep, in an unspecified state of suspended animation. Back home, they discover an Earth shattered by the centuries of atomic wars and the human civilization declining into contemplative stupor. In the mythic world of Cordwainer Smith’s fiction, the destiny of the agents of disorder is to regenerate the orderly culture and to inspire it with the vibrant, ancient spirit. In other words, the orderly and organized world of the parents becomes dull and self-destructive without the energizing influence of disorder, borne by their rebellious children. Smith’s story might seem too simple to be considered a predecessor of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, but the complexity of its magnificent, dreamlike imagery deserves attention, even if it cannot be conveyed in a summary necessitated by the paradigmatic reading.

Obviously, the vision of the morbid, oppressive capsules in rockets guided by the orderly culture from the ground provoked a vigorous response from the imaginative engineers, that is science fiction writers who wanted their characters to actually pilot the rockets. The most outstanding short stories with such a focus and intention include “Houston, Houston, Do You Read” (1974), which placed science fiction, as Robert Silverberg phrased it, “near the center of intelligent writing about the role of women and the sexual revolution” (582). Alice B. Sheldon writing under the pseudonym James Tiptree, Jr, or, less frequently, Raccoona Sheldon, sent three men around the sun, and not only let them independently fly their tiny capsule, but also let them reveal their disorderly, violent, and potentially destructive passions. Of the three astronauts, named Doc, Bud, and Dave, two belong to the grim world of the patriarchal West: Bud is a brutal cowboy, and Dave the captain is a religious patriarch. Tiptree suggests that there is a link between their navigational prowess and aggressive, destructive virility. In her story, piloting a spacecraft becomes a gender issue, and the benevolent force of the ground
control becomes a symbol of the feminine, maternal order, which the astronauts wish to reject.

Thus, the history of piloting American imaginary rockets begins with Melville’s masthead episode and oscillates, like the Pequod’s standers, between a free flight accompanied by the direct experience of the wild cosmic space, and a flight guided from the Earth, with the constrained, orderly trajectory, and the pilot protectively shielded from any contact with the wilderness. The free flight is an expression of the disorderly, subversive, and pioneering spirit, whereas the guided one is the product of an oppressive social order. The relation between order and disorder in American imaginary rocketry can be related to different American myths, delineated in Leslie Fiedler’s mythopoetic Love and Death in American Novel: the Western experience in Cooper’s novels, the rebellion of children against parents (or submission tantamount to failure), the conflict between nature and culture, and the male rebellion against the caring, feminine social order.

The echoes of these American mythical conflicts resound in the texts describing the actual rockets, published as part of a soul-searching campaign, launched by the American engineers and space scientists who tried to re-establish the American program of manned space flight after the Columbia disaster in 2002. Some commentators asked why an unbelievable amount of 150 billion dollars had been spent on an unreliable space shuttle, an imperfect realization of a dream about an airliner flying into the space. In the wake of the Columbia disaster, the rocket scientist Jeff Bell listed the apparent technological drawbacks of the “fulfilled dream”: the inefficient loading room arrangement, unstable aerodynamics, unnecessarily big windows, potentially dangerous landing gear, and inconvenient seating structure for the crew. Yet those flaws were unavoidable in the case of a vehicle which would fly and land like an airplane. The shuttle’s pilots, says Bell, would be most comfortable sitting with their backs forward on re-entry, which is standard in most spacecraft designs. This, however, “isn’t done because it would prevent the pilots from looking out the windshield and pretending that they, not computers, are flying the vehicle” (Bell, 2003).

The reasons why American astronauts must pretend they fly the airplane are perhaps as culture specific as the reasons why Yang Liwei, the first Chinese astronaut, had to take 300 kilos of rice to the orbit with him (he sat with his back forward). It is possible to argue that the design was an attempt to bridge the gap between space travel and its descriptions in science fiction, especially in the science fiction of the 1940s, which allegedly inspired the first generation of the NASA scientists, engineers, and administrators. Buck Rogers, and with him Flash Gordon, and the host of Astounding and Amazing astronauts, did actually fly their ships (Wade, 2004). Indeed, in the early days of the American space program, manual control was discouraged, as it often led to trouble, for example during Carpenter’s insubordinate manual re-entry during the flight of Mercury 7. Scott Carpenter, the Mercury
American Imaginary Rocketry

Project astronaut, coined the phrase “man-in-the-can” to describe the conditions of space flights in the 1960s (Hansen 76). When Carpenter and his fellow astronauts demanded windows in order not to sit in a sealed can, they acted like the fictional agents of disorder and paved the way for the space shuttle. The elaborate design of the shuttle was an expression of the virtual liberation from the tyranny of the machine; it was arguably an attempt to pretend that people can actually fly their ships.

More generally, an attempt to send men into the space as subjective agents who can act independently and who are confronted with nature, can be seen as a return to Melville’s vision. It turns out, however, that it is not the independent agents who fly the ship. Rockets are flown in (near) perfect accord with the laws of nature, but in total disregard of the subjects whose presence in the ship is a pretence. What is at stake is a game of independent agency (pilots), a game shaped by cultural myths, in which passengers only act out the roles of pilots. Considerable amounts of money have been spent on the development and perpetuation of this game. Perhaps the capsules are not the only places where this game is played. Writers like Melville and Pynchon suggest that it is perhaps played on the ground too, in cheaper, but equally absurd ways.

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When the American poet Elizabeth Bishop arrived in Brazil in 1951, she came as a tourist, not intending to stay. Life had other plans for her. She fell in love with an upper-class Brazilian woman, Carlotta de Macedo Soares, who invited her into her home in Petrópolis, a rich mountain resort outside of Rio, and Bishop did make her home there, for fifteen years. While she lived in Brazil, in the midst of the nation’s elite intellectual and artistic circles, Bishop continued to write poems for an American audience. For much of the fifties and early sixties, her poems were published first in The New Yorker, with whom she had a first-right-of-refusal contract. When she began to feel that its audience might find her poems too unconventional, she ended the contract in 1962, but continued to publish many of her poems there (Millier 323). As her reputation grew, Bishop became known as a poet concerned with florid landscapes, with travel and tourism, who reliably delivered exotic Latin American subjects. Although many American poets were writing touristic poems in the 1950s and ‘60s (see Robert von Hallberg, American Poetry and Culture, 1945-1980), most of Bishop’s contemporaries were writing about Europe, and could assume that their American readers shared a certain amount of cultural and ancestral knowledge about the places described in their poems. Traveling in Europe, American poets could feel some sense of cultural inferiority and economic superiority. In relation to postcolonial Brazil, Bishop was writing from a less clearly defined position. The task of writing about Brazil to Americans placed her in a somewhat awkward relationship with her Brazilian friends and readers, which would end in acrimony in 1965.

In writing for The New Yorker about Brazil, an uncommon tourist destination for even affluent Americans tourists in the ‘50s and ‘60s, Bishop was placed in a unique position as a guide for her readers. It is not only natives who must play the guide to tourists, as Dean MacCannell puts it in The Tourist. A New Theory of the Leisure Class. The situation of modernity constantly requires members of the upper and middle-classes worldwide to play the tour guide to one another: “when[ever] we travel with others to a place we have been and they have not, we play the tour guide” (191). Bishop’s poems about Brazil function, in effect, as a contact zone on the page, to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term, where many American readers of The New Yorker, who had not traveled to Brazil nor
perhaps given much thought to it, encountered representations of the country and its history for the first time.

In postcolonial Latin America, tourism has replaced colonialism as the dominant mode of interaction between the diverse native citizenry on the one hand, and American and European visitors on the other. In this context, the contact zone seems to persist in new forms. The ports and major cities, most frequented by international travelers, still function as contact zones, which Pratt described in the colonial era as "space[s] in which peoples historically and geographically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations" (7). In comparison to the relations of colonist to colonized, interactions between the tourist and the native may vary from mutual curiosity and mild prejudice to extremely asymmetrical power relations. The contact zone is a useful concept for thinking about literary representations of encounters between such distinct peoples, with the added complication that the whole weight of colonial history comes to bear on the interactions between tourist and native. Bishop’s poetry displays the full range of such relations in three poems I discuss here, two from Questions of Travel (1965) and one late poem, all of which were first published in The New Yorker. She ventriloquizes the naïve, prejudiced tourist in “Arrival at Santos,” published first in 1952; invokes a darker colonial history for the tourist in “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” published in 1960; and finally in “Pink Dog,” which was published in 1979, satirizes tourists’ willful ignorance, and natives’ fatalistic acceptance of extreme poverty in Rio as they enjoy the Carnivale (Millier 239, 301, 545).

As a tourist who became a resident of Brazil, Bishop had a difficult transition to make in becoming a guide to the country for American readers. She chose to open her 1965 book, Questions of Travel, with “Arrival at Santos” and “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” which set the political tone of the collection by juxtaposing the perspective of the tourist and the colonist from the outset. In “Arrival at Santos,” she ironizes the perspective of the American tourist amid some of her own first impressions of the port of Santos. “Brazil, January 1, 1502” is also a poem of arrival, but here Bishop goes back to an earlier beginning for her American readers, self-consciously choosing a more problematic point of entry into the landscape through Brazilian colonial history. The point she chooses is the day when Gaspar de Lemos allegedly arrived in Rio de Janeiro in January of 1502, and gave it a name based on his ignorance of the region’s geography – he mistook the bay for the mouth of a river.

In “Arrival at Santos,” the speaker, who has been on ship for eighteen days, has been longing to see land. Now that she has arrived, she perceives the landscape as arbitrary and disappointing. The insistent repetition of “here” and the use of indefinite articles and adjectives (“a” and “some”) fail to recognizably locate us in Santos:
Here is a coast; here is a harbor;  
here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery: 
impractically shaped and—who knows?—self-pitying mountains, 
sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery, 

with a little church on top of one. And warehouses, 
some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue, 
and some tall, uncertain palms. (CP 89)

The landscape is judged harshly in terms that might indirectly refer to its natives as well; the mountains are inconveniently steep and inhospitable, and they are hard to read, hiding mysterious sorrows beneath a gaudy costume of foliage. “Feeble” efforts have been made to decorate the landscape, which the arriving tourist wants to interpret as intended to provide her with a charming view. But she is not charmed. The church, which is the only hint in this poem of Portuguese Catholic colonization, is unimpressively “little,” the paint on the unpicturesque warehouses is too pale, and even the native palm trees lack confidence.

Part way through the second quatrain, however, the speaker turns on the tourist, whose disappointment she has just articulated:

Oh tourist, 
is this how this country is going to answer you 

and your immodest demands for a different world, 
and a better life, and complete comprehension 
of both at last, and immediately, 
after eighteen days of suspension?

Finish your breakfast. (CP 89)

Here the speaker chides the tourist, bringing her up short for expecting to appreciate and understand this new country instantly, and to be immediately transformed by it. What she should do, instead, is focus on immediate, practical tasks – eating her breakfast, and then boarding the little boat that will take her to land. Then, she begins to notice a few more specific details about the port:

The tender is coming, 
a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag. 
So that’s the flag. I never saw it before. 
I somehow never thought of there being a flag,
but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume, and paper money; they remain to be seen. (CP 89)

With frank naïveté and ignorance, the speaker re-aligns herself with the perspective of the tourist. This impractical and self-absorbed American tourist, seeking exotic scenery, never gave much thought to the modern nation of Brazil, and is startled by its most superficial manifestations: the national flag, whose existence she never suspected, and the Brazilian currency.

The speaker then turns her attention away from the landscape surrounding the port to “a fellow passenger named Miss Breen,” “a retired police lieutenant,” who partly represents the fact that Americans from all classes now travel. Together the speaker and Miss Breen descend awkwardly, even foolishly, into the commercial port of Santos, as a boat hook catches Miss Breen’s skirt. They descend among “twenty-six freighters / waiting to be loaded with green coffee beans,” and thus the coffee trade would seem to be more important business than tourism for the port of Santos. The pair of tourists then prepare themselves to face “The customs officials,” and, not speaking Portuguese, hope they “will speak English” and “leave [them]” their American necessities, “bourbon and cigarettes.” Finally, the speaker quickly dismisses the port, for not “car[ing] what impression [it] make[s].” In the last line, they head inland, perhaps hoping that the country there will try harder to impress tourists, but also with the implied intention to penetrate more deeply into the country: “We leave Santos at once; / we are driving to the interior” (CP 90).

Longer residence in Brazil complicated Bishop’s views of the country and her desires to represent it more accurately to American audiences. In 1961, after Bishop had been living in and writing about Brazil for nearly ten years, she was asked to write an informative, promotional book about the country for Time-Life Books in the U.S. The editors hoped she would provide a picturesque, anecdotal portrait of modern Brazil, and Bishop accepted the project, which was very well-paid, with reservations. It turned out to be a miserable experience. Sentence by sentence, she fought her editors’ desire to portray Brazil, for an American audience, in the mode of Alexander von Humboldt, as a “frontier” of untapped natural resources populated by charming, happily modernizing people, de-emphasizing the complexities of Brazil’s colonial history and contemporary politics. In 1961 and 1962, she complained in letters to her aunt Grace that the editors wanted “ALL of Brazilian history, geography, and politics reduced to pill-form – and all in two or three months.” And further, she swore “never again” to do such a project, “not for Time, Life, etc. - they are incredible people and what they know about Brazil would fit on the head of a pin - and yet the gall, the arrogance, the general condescension!” (Vas-
In short, the editors seemed to assume that a landscape poet could be counted on to serve up a picturesque Brazil, not its problematic history.

In *The New Yorker* in the ’60s, however, Bishop did seem to find an audience that was somewhat more receptive to moral and political complexity. In transforming the conventionally picturesque tradition of landscape poetry, Bishop transformed herself from tourist to a somewhat reluctant guide, and found ways to guide her American readers into the political intricacies of Brazil’s past and present, which she took as a primary subject the longer she lived there. “Arrival at Santos” really ends with the date noted after the last line — January, 1952 — which provides an explicit transition to “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” which in turns marks a defining initial moment, in temporal and spatial terms, for the contact zone in Brazil. It is also a date whose significance most American readers would not be aware of. The parallel dates, I think, ask us to consciously compare Bishop’s narration of the arrival in Santos of a tourist in January of 1952 to the arrival of the Portuguese in Rio in January of 1502. The poem includes an epigraph from Sir Kenneth Clark’s study, *Landscape into Art*, which describes Brazil as “embroidered nature... tapestried landscape,” from the perspective of a European who had found the tropical vegetation to have the rich density of tapestry. The tapestry metaphor, of course, also implies that the landscape was artistically designed to “greet” the European viewer, as the port of Santos was not:

Januaries, Nature greets our eyes
exactly as she must have greeted theirs:
every square inch filling in with foliage—
big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves.
blue, blue-green, and olive...
monster ferns…
...and flowers too...
fresh as if just finished
and taken off the frame. (*CP* 91)

This is untouched, unnamed Nature with a capital “N,” with hints of the Garden of Eden that European explorers long hoped to discover in the so-called New World. The phrase “our eyes” implicitly refers to the eyes of the American tourists, who in some ways perceive the jungle landscape around Rio “exactly” as the Portuguese did. Both are overwhelmed by the fertility of the tropical climate and vegetation, and are surprised by the size and variety of the leaves, which are implicitly compared with the lesser variety and smaller size of leaves on trees native to Portugal and North America. In the tradition
of picturesque landscape poetry, Bishop provides a vivid description of the Brazilian landscape for her American readers who probably would not have seen it and who would find it exotic, as the Portuguese did. But with the uncomfortable suggestion that tourists first see the landscape in the same manner as colonists, the poem then subtly turns toward a more political theme.

As with many early European accounts of South America, native peoples are conspicuously absent in the first two stanzas of this poem, and wild Nature is characterized as fresh or pure, designed by the hand of God. But in the second stanza, native plants and animals begin to appear, described anthropomorphically:

a few palms, swarthy, squat, but delicate;
... the big symbolic birds keep quiet,
each showing only half his puffed and padded,
pure-colored or spotted breast. (CP 91)

A sexual element creeps into the description, as stereotypical adjectives for short and dark-skinned natives, “swarthy” and “squat,” are used to describe “a few palm” trees, but their “delicate” beauty — perhaps a more European aesthetic value — is also admired. The “big symbolic birds,” possibly parrots or macaws, are provocatively silent, and provocatively bare just one breast. Here the colonial reading of the landscape, according to the Garden of Eden plot, ironically comes to the foreground. “Sin” with a capital “S” appears, personified in a group of lizards who are transfixed with desire for “the smaller, female one” whose “wicked tail” sticks “straight up and over, red as a red-hot wire.”

From this point, into the third stanza, Bishop slyly introduces the problematic question of the sexual Conquest of Brazil. The Portuguese Knights of the Order of Christ go beyond their divinely sanctioned mission in pursuing native women with their aggressive sexuality. Hard and pointed as nails, yet tiny and even ridiculous in their noisy, awkward armor, they advance into the overwhelming, enormous jungle landscape:

Just so the Christians, hard as nails,
tiny as nails, and glinting,
in creaking armor, came and found it all,
not unfamiliar:
no lovers’ walks, no bowers,
no cherries to be picked, no lute music,
but corresponding, nevertheless,
to an old dream of wealth and luxury
already out of style when they left home—wealth, plus a brand-new pleasure. \(CP\ 92\)

Just as the Portuguese imposed their Christian ideas of the Sinful temptations of wild Nature on the Brazilian landscape and natives, so they impose their desires for land and a more or less feudal society, and hypocritically indulge themselves in Sin, pursuing the native women with an energy that is suggestive of rape:

Directly after Mass, humming perhaps \(L’\text{Homme armé}\) or some such tune,
they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
each out to catch an Indian for himself—\(CP\ 92\)

The metaphor of the tapestry, “taken off the frame” in the first stanza, returns, as the Christians aggressively penetrate the jungle. It is hard to say how we are to perceive this aggression, but we do know that Bishop did some research into allegations about the early sexual relations of colonist and colonized. In the Time-Life book \(Brazil\), she quotes Pedro Vaz de Caminha, a scribe on Pedro Alvares Cabral’s flagship, who describes the appeal of the native women. She concludes that the Portuguese were “eager miscegenationists almost immediately” (28). It is difficult to know whether this phrase can be ascribed to Bishop or to her editors, who changed her language in many instances. Whatever the case, she is more ambiguous in the poem, suggesting the fear of native women, like hunted birds, who call out to each other as they flee the Christians, and disappear further and further into the jungle to escape:

those maddening little women who kept calling,
calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
and retreating, always retreating, behind it. \(CP\ 92\)

In these closing lines, there is a faint echo of the end of “Arrival at Santos.” Like the Portuguese colonists, the American tourists are “driving [into] the interior.” Presumably the intentions of the tourists are more benign; they hope to find and appreciate a different world that might lead them to a better life than the one they left behind in America, as Bishop in fact did. Of course, Bishop does not resolve the questions posed by linking the figures of the tourist and the colonist as she does in these two poems. But the link itself is important and suggestive, posing problems about whether the tourist can avoid mimicking the attitudes of the colonist, in whose footsteps she inevitably follows. This ambiguous presentation, of sexual interaction between the conquer-
ing knights and the native women, places the tourist-reader in the uncomfortable position of interpreting one of the most charged and problematic interactions of the contact zone.

As it turned out, Bishop left Brazil after the suicide of de Macedo Soares in 1967, for which some friends and family cruelly blamed Bishop. But a debacle with another article about Brazil for the popular American press had already soured her relations with many of her Brazilian friends in 1965. The New York Times Magazine commissioned a short piece about Carnivale on the 400th anniversary of the city of Rio. Her persistent attempts at subtlety and historical scope in this article led the editor to send her a curt telegraph: “WE’RE NOT INTERESTED HISTORY OF RIO” (Vassar 42.14). The reaction in Rio to the rather critical article, however, was fierce. She had complained of the commercialization of Carnivale and at the same time celebrated the event’s, and Rio’s, harmonious racial and religious diversity. Bishop’s biographer argues that her “chief literary tools—irony and understatement” had been missed, and more progressive Brazilian readers found her celebration of racial harmony in Brazil to be acceptance of a racist social structure. For a time, Bishop avoided Rio entirely because of the reaction to the article (Millier 362-366).

A more successful evocation of the problems of Carnivale was, again, a poem. Bishop had begun “Pink Dog” in 1963, but did not manage to finish it for Questions of Travel or her last volume, Geography III; it was published in The New Yorker in 1979 (Millier 545). The addressee of the poem is an almost invisible figure at the Carnivale, a hairless dog. The speaker urges the dog, who stands in for Brazil’s picturesque poor, to be entertaining for the tourists or she will probably be drowned:

Of course they’re mortally afraid of rabies.
You are not mad; you have a case of scabies
but look intelligent. Where are your babies?

(A nursing mother, by those hanging teats.)
In what slum have you hidden them, poor bitch,
while you go begging, living by your wits?

Now look, the practical, the sensible

Solution is to wear a fantasia.
Tonight you simply can’t afford to be an eyesore. But no one will ever see a
dog in máscara this time of year.
Ash Wednesday’ll come but Carnival is here.
What sambas can you dance? What will you wear? (CP 190-191)

The speaker, surely, is the only person paying any attention to the dog. Her satiric tone echoes that of “Arrival at Santos,” but it signifies a purely grim irony here. Like the people of Rio who dress up and dance the sambas, the dog has emerged from the slum to have a good time and to amuse and please the tourists, but the life they all will return to is one of dire poverty, squalor and neglected children.

In deciding what to explain to the uninitiated tourist in an unfamiliar place, every tour guide necessarily selects some historical facts or myths for attention and omits others. What should we make of the fact that Bishop followed up “Arrival at Santos” immediately with “Brazil, January 1, 1502”? In introducing her American readers in The New Yorker to Brazil, Bishop seemed to decide that the sexual conquest of Brazil by the Portuguese Catholic Knights, in parallel with their “tearing into” the Brazilian landscape, was the fundamental historical knowledge on which to base a further acquaintance with modern Brazil. Her last word on Brazil, in “Pink Dog,” returns to the present and evokes the darkest view of the relationship between tourist and native. With equal skill, Bishop evokes the naïve, prejudiced touristic attitude to Latin America, the dark history of exotic geography, invisible to the superficial touristic gaze, and the radical inequalities of the present that the tourist would rather overlook. The fact that she sought to juxtapose these perspectives, at the start of Questions of Travel and in her oeuvre as a whole, begins to indicate the awkward position of the American poet abroad, who is also, at times, a post-colonial tourist.

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Beyond Parody: Literariness in John Ashbery’s Plays

John Ashbery wrote his first play, *The Heroes*, in 1950, a few years before he began to make his name as a poet. *The Compromise*, his only three-act play, came next (in 1955, a year before the publication of *Some Trees*), and his last play thus far, *The Philosopher*, limited, like *The Heroes*, to one act, was written in 1960. Critics usually find these dramas worth mentioning when they can be used to explain, illustrate or contextualize something in Ashbery’s poems, yet in and of themselves they have received scant attention. Such neglect, relative though it be, is nevertheless curious, since precisely because of their proleptic significance the plays should merit greater scrutiny, even if their apparent straightforwardness and simplicity might seem to be at odds with the complexities of the poems, so much so that extended analysis appears risibly redundant. But even treating the plays as, first and foremost, parodic, as David Lehman and Kevin Killian have done, deflects attention from a quality they share with many poems by Ashbery, and it is this quality I would like to examine in some detail, primarily as it appears in his dramas. I call it literariness, and even though the term does not have currency in critical discourse, I find it useful as a kind of shorthand for several simultaneously present aspects of some, but not very many, literary texts.

The most important of these aspects for my purposes here is the text’s relation to what Edward Mendelson has called “the world outside.” This expression comes up in Geoff Ward’s account of influence in Ashbery’s work.

Auden’s poetry *enacts*, rather than describing, the conditions of menace and trepidation that are its psycho-political base. A comment of Edward Mendelson’s in relation to those early texts might have some application to early Ashbery: ‘As soon as one stops looking for the key to a set of symbols, and recognizes that the poems focus on the self-enclosing patterns that bar their way to a subject in the world outside, their notorious obscurity begins to vanish.’ The self-enclosing pattern of end-rhymes in [Ashbery’s] ‘Two Scenes’ is the shield of a greeting that subjectivity extends to the world only to turn away from its inaccessibility, somewhat as the hand of Parmigianino is ambivalently placed vis-à-vis the viewer in the convex self-portrait that would lend its title to Ashbery’s most famous meditation. (99)
Following Mendelson, Ward assumes that “the world outside,” no matter how whimsical its representation in Ashbery’s early poems might be, nonetheless constitutes a referential basis, a broadly shared, experiential concept of reality, necessary to write, read and understand anything at all. While the presence of such a frame of reference in Auden’s early work is quite plausible, encumbering Ashbery’s with it seems to be off the mark. “The world outside” is dynamic, in constant flux, and even conventional constructions of it take this into account. What may pass for “the world outside” in many of the poems in Some Trees, but also in later ones, such as “The Skaters” or “The Recital,” as well as in the plays, is static, utterly conventionalized, and with no mimetic ambitions whatsoever. In Some Trees, the ultimate frame of reference can be narrowed down to the poetry of Wallace Stevens and W.H. Auden, which is, quite simply, there, and does not change in the way our lives in the world do. Such an approach to “the world outside” is a constitutive trait of literariness, not only in Ashbery’s writing, but also Firbank’s, Borges’, Perec’s, Calvino’s, and Roussel’s.

Literariness, however, is something more than terms such as “autotelic,” “self-referential” or “meta” literature indicate. A text can be completely autotelic, for example, Henry James’ “The Figure in the Carpet,” even if the rest of an author’s oeuvre does not have this quality in the smallest degree. Literariness, therefore, is as much a feature of a given text as of its author’s general aesthetic stance. This appears most saliently in the case of Raymond Roussel, whose influence on Ashbery is much greater than Ward makes it out to be.1 “The world outside” in his writings has the status of a chess board, on which the figures of his imagination can move according to established, but secret, procedures, and that is the only function it has or is allowed to have. His work is radically non-mimetic, or even anti-mimetic. The same quality may be seen in the work of Ronald Firbank, also an important source of inspiration for Ashbery. The plots of most of his novels, as well as of his play, The Princess Zoubaroff, are so sketchy as to be barely noticeable: what counts is how the flat characters speak, as well as the brilliant descriptive flourishes that intersperse the dialogue. Of course, they speak like no one on earth, and this, along with the contrived circumstances under which they do so, makes Firbank’s writing akin to Roussel’s, even though stylistically and temperamentally they could not be more different. Ashbery may have read a play or two by Roussel by the time he set to work on The Philosopher, but was certainly familiar with Firbank’s fiction while still a student at Harvard. Firbankian camp makes its presence felt quite strongly in

1 Ward writes that “postmodernist nabobs” such as Calvino, Borges and Perec, “like Ashbery… have adapted the techniques of Chinese-box illusionism developed by Raymond Roussel in texts like Locus Solus (1914) and applied them to the complexities of human psychology and behavior, where Roussel could only really offer an appealingly lunatic dandyism” (100). Ashbery’s Charles Eliot Norton lecture on Roussel shows how reductive and excessively glib this account of influence is.
the first two of Ashbery’s plays, while Roussel’s method of dramatic exposition and the theme of a treasure hunt appear in the third.

In the opening sequence of *The Philosopher*, four characters (the spinster Emily, her orphaned niece Carol, and their devoted servants Lily and Napoleon,) inform one another of who they are and why they have traveled to a gloomy country house on Christmas eve. The aim of this exchange of information is, of course, to let the audience know what brings these characters together and what has brought them to the gothic mansion of Carol’s deceased Uncle Jeremiah, but one would be hard pressed to find in the history of modern drama an introduction to events about to unfold on stage as artless as Ashbery’s.² When Carol asks Emily whether she thinks that Uncle Jeremiah remembered them in his will, she answers:

I don’t know, dear. All I know is that three days ago, just one year after Jeremiah’s death, Lawyer Flint sent me a telegram saying that according to the terms of Uncle’s will, everyone whose name appears in it must spend Christmas eve here in Woodlawn Hall, where the will is to be read tonight after dinner. (125)

Lily corroborates and expands: “Lawyer Flint axed you to get here early with your niece and two trusted family retainuhs, me and Napoleon, so as to get the place tidied up and the tree trimmed before the others arrive” (125). Then Carol preposterously tells Emily about the day when, still an infant, she was delivered to her aunt’s house by kind strangers, and the plot proper can get rolling. Although *The Philosopher* is, on one level, a send-up of murder mysteries set in country houses, the sheer clumsiness of passages such as the ones above suggests that the parody extends beyond immediate inspirations (David Lehman lists “Hollywood movies such as Paul Leni’s silent *The Cat and the Canary* and a B-movie from the 1940s called *Who Killed Aunt Maggie*, in which the heirs assemble to hear the reading of an eccentric millionaire’s will”; 143). The characters have just told us what they know, referring to a shared past and present. This is the world within which they shall remain until something happens that will shatter or at least radically alter it (it never does – the play breaks off before anything other than foreshadowing can occur). Even though a steady flow of characters arriving at the mansion keeps the conversation flowing, each of them has an equal chance of being exposed as the villain or celebrated as the hero of the play. The only thing audiences can do is conjure up vari-

² There are significant exceptions: in Ionesco’s *The Bald Soprano* (1950), a famous play Ashbery most probably had read or seen in the 1950s, the characters inform one another of who they are and why they have assembled in the same room (Ionesco’s inspiration came from handbooks for learners of English). Roussel’s influence, however, is at least as likely as Ionesco’s.
ous permutations of familiar plots, but when the curtain falls they are still no wiser than Carol or Emily. The knowledge they and we are denied, however, has nothing to do with “the world outside,” and therefore may be referred to as “knowledge,” the quotation marks bringing in one of Ronald Firbank’s favorite ways of keeping references to that world at bay.

Rather than parodying a Hollywood murder mystery for the sake of “good, clean fun,” Ashbery prefers to make holes in what readers think they know, or think they get to know, when they confront a literary text with “the world outside.” The knowledge gained thanks to such a confrontation is merely “knowledge,” just as “the world outside” must forever remain in quotation marks to be cognitively useful, that is, useful in our efforts to come to grips with the text. In other words, the object of Ashbery’s parody is a quest for knowledge, as futile in the text of the play as such as in the minds of disappointed readers. Thus understood, the parodic strain of the play is limited to its unresolved plot, while all of its other aspects, even though they may seem to be parodic, do not belong in this rubric. If *The Philosopher* is “about” anything, it is about the way in which the characters speak, chiefly because their class, age and race-specific idiolects frequently veer away from what we might reasonably, or just conventionally, expect. The following lines are spoken by Rocky, a prize fighter:

Naw – we got engaged on the bus coming out here. The minute I saw her waitin’ in line at the bus terminal I knew I’d seen her somewhere. Then she hitched up her stocking and I recognized her – Gloria ‘Goldilocks’ Anderson – one of the most titillating temptresses of our time. A devotee of the terpsichorean art, I arranged to get the seat next to hers – and before we’d passed Sneden’s Landing I was plightin’ our troth with the ring I always carry for just such an emergency. *(Gloria shows ring.)* How do you like that, folks – a 21-carat zircon! (141)

Half a page later, when Whitney Ambleside, who introduces himself as “a professor of oriental philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris,” mentions the whereabouts of his stalled car, Rocky says:

That’s funny – we passed through there on the bus and I didn’t see nothin’ of no broken-down car.

WHITNEY

3 “Terpsichorean art” puts in an appearance in *The Compromise*, when Royal Mounted Policeman Harry Reynolds tells two Indian braves that his traveling companion is “Miss Daisy Farrell, of Elk City, *chanteuse* and devotee of the terpsichorean art.” When one of them, Running Deer, says: “Me no understand last part of sentence,” Harry admits: “Neither do I, Running Deer! That’s the way she describes herself” (62).
Perhaps your powers of observation equal your superb command of English grammar. (141)

Some professors may speak like Ambleside, but no one speaks like Rocky. While Ionesco parodied the exchanges between characters in language learners’ handbooks (for instance, “Good afternoon, Mary, I am your husband, John, and these are our children, Jack and Jill”), Raymond Roussel did not parody anything at all, even though his characters usually sound as wooden as those in Jules Verne’s novels. Like Roussel’s, Ashbery’s motive was not to make fun of non-realist or non-mimetic speech, but to celebrate it. At the time when the Theatre of the Absurd with its “comedy of menace” was the only kind of contemporary drama savvy critics in Europe took seriously, Ashbery made the political and existential menace lurking in everyday speech into a campily subversive response to the Absurdists’ principal assumptions.

*The Philosopher* breaks off so abruptly because Ashbery had planned to write another act or two, as he indicates in his application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, submitted in 1957. According to David Lehman, “[t]he cardboard characters would begin talking seriously ‘and the play would suddenly cease being a farce and become a sort of Ingmar Bergman drama’” (144). This might suggest that the playwright was not quite sure what he was doing when he wrote the first act, except having a good time. But as Lehman points out, even though there is no evidence of Ashbery’s having written anything else than the first act of *The Philosopher*, closure or merely its prospect may have been a problem, as in *The Compromise*, where “the Author” must come on stage at the end of the play to explain his failure to bring matters to a satisfying conclusion. Lehman also claims that the conclusion is very satisfying indeed, in spite of a complaint by a critic, possibly John Simon, who wrote in *Audience* that Ashbery all but ruins his “lusty parody,” his “spoof of the glorious Westerns from the golden age of the silver screen,” by inserting “the Author” into the final scene. Lehman disagrees, calling the Author’s speech “the most resonant moment of the play”; “Like the hero of ‘The Painter,’ [a poem from *Some Trees*] Ashbery the playwright is faced with a crisis in the mimetic ideal. Since he says he could find no patterns or rules for either human speech or human relationships, ‘there was nothing in life for my art to imitate’” (143). This is as far as Lehman takes the matter of dramatic closure and its relation to mimeticism, as well as to parody. We might go a step further if we take “patterns” and “rules” to be the key concepts of the Author’s mock retraction.

*The Compromise* travesties a Rin Tin Tin movie called *Where the North Begins* (1923), though Ashbery leaves out the central character, that is, the dog. Margaret Reynolds, the wife of a Mountie named Harry, and the mother of Little Jim, has been wait-
ing for over a year for her husband to come back from a police mission. She has two suitors: Harry’s colleague from the police force, Allan Dale, and the local strongman and villain, Sam Dexter. She succumbs to Dexter’s advances after Little Jim is kidnapped by an Indian in Dexter’s pay. The child is left at an Indian village, and seen as the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy that a white child shall be born to one of the squaws and deliver the tribe from its imminent doom. When Harry, a good friend of the tribe’s chief – who has not been taken in by the obviously fraudulent claim that Little Jim is a squaw’s son – visits the village, he is told of his son’s disappearance and decides to return to his wife, acting on a hunch that Dexter is responsible for the kidnapping. Back home, he confronts both Dale and Dexter, then Dale kills Dexter, then Margaret says she loves Dale and Harry equally, and then the Indians arrive with little Jim. It is only at this point, when the plot of the play has been by and large resolved, that the Author comes on stage. After recounting the problems he has had with writing the play, and saying that even though he had “gotten on” with it “by hook or by crook, as you may have noticed,” he still needs “an ending.” As he further explains:

[a]nd then I hit upon an idea which seemed brilliant to me and still does. My play would reflect the very uncertainty of life, where things are seldom carried through to a conclusion, let alone a satisfactory one. I would omit the final scene from my master piece! And you, vague and shadowy creatures, would not need any resolution of your imaginary difficulties, you could just walk off into the night, together… Where are you going? Stop! (118)

Coming after the play’s effective resolution, the Author’s speech is far too contrived to be taken at face value. The real reason for his confession lies in the nature of this resolution: conventionally enough, the villain has perished, and the Reynolds family has been reunited, but with two twists one would never see in a Hollywood film or a contemporary American play: Margaret initiates a ménage a trois, and Little Jim is allowed to stay with the Indian chief, with whom he has been living for the past five years. In other words, the play’s ending is utterly scandalous, and the stage instructions following the Author’s speech leave little doubt as to what the future will bring: “Margaret, spotlighted, flanked by Harry and Dale, smiles alternately at both of them, and both fondle her. Only the Chief, at the left of the stage in a spotlight, and Jim, who kneels before him, do not move” (118). The scandal is not merely sexual. The “patterns” and “rules” mentioned by the Author have just been subverted and, indeed, undone, along with the assumption of iterability implied by “rules” and “patterns” and associated with the predictability that underlies mimeticism and realism. By suggest-
ing that this is precisely what he has done in his ending, Ashbery provides a plausible reason for his final speech, while simultaneously saying that the ending we have just witnessed is not an ending at all, or at least nor a “real” ending. It is not “real” because it breaks rules and does not follow patterns. The Author’s speech is therefore a parody of such retraction or ex post facto explanations, a parody at least as highly motivated as the much more obvious one of Rin Tin Tin or Western – and Northern – lore. The characters, those “vague and shadowy creatures,” are denied the affinities with characters in Westerns that readers or audiences would be quick to spot, and cast as “emanations” of the Author’s wayward “esemplastic power.” This brings into focus their literariness, their role in populating “the world inside,” rather than mediating “the world outside.” The “crisis in the mimetic ideal” Lehman detects in the Author’s speech is therefore nothing but a ruse, since Ashbery denies the existence of such an ideal, at least in his own writing.

This is not to say that he ignores its existence in the writing of others and generally in modern culture: indeed, Ashbery frequently refers to and plays with mimeticism, not only when he says that his poems consist of whatever he happens to be thinking about, or just hearing, as he writes them. While “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” contains his most sustained and profound reflections on artistic imitation, one of his earliest texts, The Heroes, inaugurates and augurs, as we can say with hindsight, this major theme of Ashbery’s oeuvre. The heroes of the play are Theseus, Circe and Ulysses, as well as Achilles, who has invited them to his country estate for the weekend. Achilles’ live-in boyfriend, Patroclus, falls in love at first sight, Circe tries to seduce Theseus, or whoever else she might happen upon, by means of her magic girdle, while a Chorus comments on the proceedings, but nothing really happens until Patroclus dies of a broken heart during a dance, and a few pages later the play ends. Patroclus’ death comes immediately after the following exchange:

PATROCLUS
Oh Theseus, mayn’t I sleep at the foot of your bed tonight, like a pet spaniel? I promise I’ll lie still as a mummy.

THESEUS
Ackgh! You’re revolting!
(He breaks away from Patroclus and goes out.)

PATROCLUS
Oh, dear! I must have said something to hurt him!
(He falls on the couch, sobbing) (26)
This scene, as Kevin Killian reminds us, was quite risqué in the early fifties, for it shows men dancing with one another, and a thinly disguised homosexual proposal is rejected in a way that makes the disguise quite transparent (335). Why these men are Homeric heroes is a different matter, to which neither Killian nor Lehman pays much attention. Yet these men or heroes are crucial referents in High Modernist works, such as Pound’s *Cantos* or Joyce’s *Ulysses*, as well as some of Yeats’ poems: in 1950, these were the most respected, discussed, imitated and implicitly or explicitly referred to literary works in English. By having his heroes expose their lack of heroism (Theseus claims that the Minotaur was just a “great big doodle-bug made of wood and painted canvas”), Ashbery takes their status down a few pegs, while showing how their mythic uniqueness has been absorbed and leveled by various conventions, not least literary ones. Refusing to follow the Modernist school of Homeric or more broadly mythic referential framing – which always had as its ultimate purpose a critique of current socio-political or cultural conditions – Ashbery uses his heroes as counters in an attempt to put forth an alternative to Modernist theory and practice, in which the hitherto fixed meanings of each hero’s acts can be manipulated, subverted, or perverted at will. In so doing, he shows up the contingency of myth and implies that using it to impose order on a wildly fluctuating “world outside” is just so much wishful thinking. Stasis and the conventions of representation, as well as the relation between knowledge and beauty, are at the core of the following exchange between Circe and Theseus.

Theseus begins with a delicious blunder: “Well, and how have you been, Medea?” and when Circe corrects him, adding that she knows “what witchcraft does to a woman’s face,” says: ‘Forgive me. You’re a very beautiful woman.” The rest of their exchange must be quoted at length:

**CIRCE**
Oh that we have to converse in this way! Why can’t each one say just what he thinks? If you men would only have the nerve to say, ‘Circe, you’re a disgusting old bag!’ Then after we got the insults out of the way we might accomplish something. Stop calling each other dearie. This way we no more resemble human beings than those silly figures on the front of the Parthenon do.

**THESEUS**
Excuse me, Circe, but I don’t agree with you there. I think those figures are beautiful. And I think that people are beautiful in the same way.

**CIRCE**
I don’t get it.

**THESEUS**
Let me tell you of an experience I had while I was on my way here. My train had stopped in the station directly opposite another. Through the glass I was able to watch a couple in the next train, a man and a woman who were having some sort of conversation. For fifteen minutes I watched them. I had no idea what their relation was. I could form no idea of their conversation. They might have been speaking words of love, or planning a murder, or quarreling about their in-laws. Yet just from watching them talk, even though I could hear nothing, I feel I know those people better than anyone in the world.

CIRCE
You’re a strange man.

THESEUS
Coming from you, that must be a compliment. (9-10)

Circe’s initial complaint concerns the similarity between the Parthenon’s stone sculptures – conventional and therefore “silly” – and the conventions governing the intercourse of living humans, be they heroes or just “strange men” and witches. In other words, when a hero acts as he is expected to, nothing will be “accomplished,” that is, communicated. A radical departure from convention, for instance telling Circe she is a “disgusting old bag,” or allowing Margaret to enjoy two husbands, is the only way out of such a stalemate. Theseus’ response pits realistic representation against established canons of beauty, and since he has earlier called himself a “true aesthete,” whose “indifference” made possible his “slaying” of the Minotaur, it should come as no surprise that he wants to trade on his reputation as a dragon-slayer, his fixed identity within the world of mythical heroes, even as he keeps claiming that there was nothing heroic to his deed. But his claims may be construed as yet another convention, a kind of false modesty that befits a true hero. In fact, there is strong evidence for such a construction: when the agitated Patroclus asks about the virgins fed to the Minotaur, whose bodies Theseus saw in the labyrinth, he confirms that they really were there, though the Minotaur, being just a “doodle-bug,” could not have killed them. This logical lapse comes up several times in the play, and no sensible explanation for it is offered – when pressed as to how he knows the virgins were dead, Theseus merely says: “I just have a feeling” (24). Theseus’ illogical persistence belies both his own version of events and the one we know from mythology, while allowing him to play a modest, self-deprecating gentleman, who – unconventionally – puts his faith in feelings, not facts. This, in essence, is the meaning of his account of the people he watched through a train window as they talked: he feels he knows them “better than anyone in the world.”

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Theseus has no idea what the couple he watches are talking about. He sees their faces, but does not hear the words they speak. He “knows” them as pure surfaces, and that is what makes them beautiful, like the “figures on the front of the Parthenon.” Whatever may lie beneath the surfaces of statues or living people puts at risk their beauty, and therefore feeling you know all that is worth knowing about them makes empirical knowledge useless and/or noxious. David Lehman discerns in Theseus the aesthete the same kind of tension that would later emerge in Ashbery the poet:

It is the mark of Ashbery’s poetry that with ‘the indifference of a true aesthete’ he is able to undermine his own romantic gestures and visionary ambitions, to expose and critique the artifice of his work at the same time as he revels in it. In one other place in Ashbery’s work does he opt for the same theatrical metaphor. ‘Yes, friends, these clouds pulled along on invisible ropes are, as you have guessed, merely stage machinery,’ he writes in ‘The Wrong Kind of Insurance’ (1977). ‘And the funny thing is it knows we know / About it and still wants us to go on believing / In what it so unskillfully imitates and wants / To be loved not for that but for itself.’ (141)

Theseus’ claim that understanding may be an obstacle to experiencing beauty, as well as to gaining knowledge, falls within the sphere of literariness, for it excludes “the world outside” from serious consideration. We know much more than we understand, Ashbery seems to have been saying throughout his career, but imperfect understanding does not diminish our knowledge. Neither should it diminish the pleasure we take in things or texts in which, as he writes in “And Ut Pictura Poesis Is Her Name,” understanding is “undone.”

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The United States of America has featured prominently in Polish post-World War II travel writing, including the period of communism (1945-1989). In this not so distant past, much of the context for the production and consumption of relevant works was determined by the activity of state propaganda which generally attempted to impose a negative image of “America” as the leader of the capitalist West. Interestingly, a large group of works from this period, recounting the authors’ travels to the United States, seem not to have yielded too much to the demands of the official ideology and present a balanced portrayal of the visited country. The foundation on which such works grew was a well-ingrained positive image of the United States in Poland. While the intensity of state anti-American propaganda varied, the positive valuation of the symbol of “America” among Poles remained very strong throughout the period.

In this broad context, it seems that Polish writers’ accounts of travel to the United States can be interpreted and theorized within the framework of Victor Turner’s processual analysis, and this for two reasons. Firstly, because Turner’s anthropological framework can be used – and indeed has been used – in the analysis of travel in literature, and secondly, because of Turner’s important contribution to the study of one type of process: pilgrimage. Given the symbolic significance of the United States for Poles in communist Poland, it appears that at least some Polish writers’ travels to the United States can be interpreted as a form of pilgrimage. In this article, the American journey that the Polish writer Andrzej Kijowski undertook in the years 1972-1973 will be discussed within this Turnerian framework.¹

Victor Turner’s interest was focused mainly on one type of ritual, the rite of passage. As is known, Turner took over and built upon ideas first put forward by Arnold van Gennep in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the latter’s definition, rites of passage are rites which “accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another” (van Gennep 10) and consist of three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. In the first stage the individual or group is separated

¹ This is a modified version of a paper that was presented at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Albuquerque, October 16-19, 2008.
from a stable point in the social structure. In the middle, liminal period, the individual or group goes through a realm that is “in between” the previous and the new state (Turner, *Ritual Process* 94). The last stage returns the individual or group, “inwardly transformed and outwardly changed,” to a stable point in the social structure again (Turner, “Variations on a Theme of Liminality” 36).

Turner himself demonstrated how to apply this general framework to the analysis of pilgrimage. In his 1973 article “The Center Out There: Pilgrim’s Goal,” he discusses pilgrimages as liminal phenomena. Several years later he concretized his original proposal. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, the book that he co-authored with his wife, Edith Turner, in 1978, theorizes pilgrimage not as a liminal but liminoid phenomenon. As the authors explain, liminal phenomena proper, characteristic of pre-industrial societies, were obligatory for the whole community. In modern society, however, with the advent of the distinction between work and leisure, certain activities became non-obligatory and participation in them, outside the confines of work, became a matter of choice. And so, “since it is voluntary, not an obligatory social mechanism to mark the transition of an individual or group from one state or status to another within the mundane sphere, pilgrimage is perhaps best thought of as ‘liminoid’ or ‘quasi-liminal,’ rather than ‘liminal’ in Van Gennep’s full sense” (34-35).

The general Turnerian processual framework has been used in the analysis of travel in literature. William Stowe in his 1994 book *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, applied it to the analysis of American travel narratives. As he writes,

> Turner’s description of ritual is especially relevant for the study of travel because its three-stage structure… clearly parallels the structure of a journey…. Travel obviously involves a separation, a move into a privileged region of time and space, then a period of privileged activity, free from the demands of work and home… and finally, usually, a reintegration into the home society. (21-22)

Such was the main processual structure of the Polish writer Andrzej Kijowski’s 1972-1973 American journey. Kijowski came to the United States as a participant of the International Writing Program, run at the University of Iowa by the poet Paul Engle and his wife Hualing Nieh Engle. The organizers’ intention was to invite yearly to the United States a group of writers from all over the world, to give them time to work and exchange ideas, and to help them experience America: a gift of time and resources. Kijowski, as most other participants of the Program, spent several months in Iowa City, then – accompanied at this point by his wife – embarked on a period of travel around the
West and South of the United States, and finally returned to his home country. Could his journey be also interpreted as a form of pilgrimage?

According to Victor Turner and Edith Turner, the modern, liminoid “pilgrimage… has some of the attributes of liminality in passage rites”; among these, the authors list “release from mundane structure; homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behavior; communitas; ordeal; reflection on the meaning of basic religious and cultural values” and “movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery which suddenly, transiently, becomes central for the individual, an axis mundi of his faith” (34). A later and in some senses broader definition by Alan Morin, speaks of pilgrimage as “a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal” (4).

America did function symbolically as “a sacred periphery” and as an embodiment of valued ideals for many Poles. The historical roots of this go back to the eighteenth century. At that time, for Poland that had just lost its independence through Prussian, Austrian and Russian partitions, America, with its success in the War of Independence, was, in the words of Polish historian Jerzy Jedlicki, an example radiating “a magnetic force” (209). In the nineteenth century, the first waves of migration from the partitioned Poland reached America. Much of the migrants’ experience was harsh, but still, as Jedlicki observes, in comparison to the hardships they had left in Poland, “America… remained a promised land and… turned out to be a promise kept, the land of bread and freedom” (215). In the twentieth century the “magnetic force” that many Poles saw radiating from America was further strengthened. At the end of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points plan included a point calling for the re-creation of independent Poland. After World War II, between the years 1945 and 1995, America not only became home for over 800,000 new Polish political and economic migrants (Michałek 16), but also, and perhaps more importantly, was generally looked upon with hope as the power capable of stopping the global expansion of the new oppressor of Poland, the Soviet Union. The image of America as “the land of bread and freedom,” the embodiment of the ideals of prosperity and liberty, continued and was very vivid for Kijowski’s generation.

In 1972, the year when his American travel began, Kijowski was already an established literary critic and writer. An editor of the literary monthly Twórczość, he was a member of the officially recognized intellectual elite of communist Poland, but at the same time he managed to keep up a commitment to oppositional values. He published in the Catholic weekly Tygodnik Powszechny; he was also increasingly involved in oppositional political activities. After his return from America, in the late 1970s, he wrote pro-

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2 The concept of communitas will be defined and discussed below.
3 All translations from Polish in the present article have been done by the author.
grammatic documents for one of the Polish underground organizations, Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe [Polish Independence Accord], and acted as a lecturer in the oppositional Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych [Society of Scholarly Courses]. He was briefly interned when martial law was introduced by the communist government in 1981. In 1985 he died of eye cancer.

Information about Kijowski’s travel to America can be derived from various sources. These include the book account of the journey which he published in 1982 in one of the official Polish publishing houses Czytelnik, entitled *Podróż na najdalszy Zachód* [Journey to the Farthest West], his *Dziennik* [Diary], the three volumes of which were published posthumously in the years 1998-1999 in the changed context of post-communist Poland, as well as archival material related to the University of Iowa International Writing Program and preserved at the office of the Program, and in the Special Collections Department of the University of Iowa Libraries, which the present author had an opportunity to consult.

To see if the Turnerian framework can be used to interpret meaningfully and theorize Andrzej Kijowski’s travel experience, an attempt will be made to determine if the analyzed sources contain a reflection of the three stages of a rite of passage that any travel seems to fit into: separation, transition (liminality), and incorporation (reaggregation). More specifically, regarding the middle stage, the analysis of the sources will also attempt to determine if Kijowski experienced any of the attributes of liminality posited by Victor Turner and Edith Turner for the modern, liminoid pilgrimage. This, if found to be the case, may give grounds to regard Kijowski’s journey as a kind of secular pilgrimage.

In the general processual framework, the first stage is separation. The sources contain little information about it, yet it is not completely absent from them. Of significance may be the record of the fears that Kijowski had at that time regarding the travel. Surprisingly, he was afraid of America itself. As he wrote, “I never really believed that America exists, nor that the Earth is round” (*Podróż* 8). Of course he knew that this was all true; but just as it was difficult to experience the roundness of the Earth, so it was difficult for a Pole to experience America first hand, especially the America that was popularly imagined from a distance. As a result of this fear he avoided things American, including American literature, and once, earlier, he went as far as to refuse to go to America on scholarship. Also, he was afraid of the journey as such – afraid that it would not change anything and that all the time he would feel his old self acting. So, in his case, the separation stage seems to have been marked predominantly by fear.

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4 Kijowski first published an account of his American experience in 1974 in ten installments in the Polish literary weekly *Literatura* (from January 3 to March 7 of that year). In the next two years he reworked this original text, which eventually was published as a book in 1982.
Andrzej Kijowski’s American Journey

To Victor Turner, it was the middle, liminal stage that was the most interesting in the ritual process. The passage from Image and Pilgrimage quoted above lists “release from mundane structure; homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behavior; communitas; ordeal; reflection on the meaning of basic religious and cultural values” as well as “movement from a mundane center to a sacred periphery” among the attributes of liminality characteristic of the modern, liminoid pilgrimage (34). To what extent are these attributes attested in the analyzed sources?

First, Kijowski certainly experienced release from mundane structure during his stay in America. It should not be surprising, as it was the intention of the founders of the International Writing Program to take the writers out of their usual environments and give them the opportunity to write undisturbed, as well as to experience America. Kijowski noted: “Paul Engle said clearly that everybody should live as he or she pleased. If they want to translate and present their works – fine, if they want to work in silence – also fine, if only they would remember what they did in Iowa City” (Podróż 61). In a letter to his wife, Kazimiera, in Poland he mentions the feeling of unreality which overwhelmed him: on the plains of Iowa, insulated from all typical everyday problems, he lost his sense of time and space (Dziennik 1970-1977 212). Also in the second part of his stay, traveling around the United States, he was away from the usual domestic or work-related concerns.

Homogenization of status also characterized his and other writers’ participation in the Program. The organization of the stay in Iowa was such that all the visiting members had exactly the same status in the group, whether they were accomplished writers, or novices. They all lived in the same dormitory, named the Mayflower, and had the same rights and privileges.

Simplicity of dress and behavior seems to have gone together with Kijowski’s release from mundane structure. Save for some formal occasions, there was little need to dress up or insist on complex daily behavior in the group that the writers formed, especially as they stayed together in one dormitory and were able to see each other informally many times a day. It can be supposed that also during the journey around the United States the Kijowskis tended to dress and behave in a simple way, typical of tourists.

Communitas, included in the list of liminal features, is an important – and complex – part of the framework. It can be defined in the following way: “A relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities…. It is a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship…. It does not merge identities; it liberates them from conformity to general norms” (Turner and Turner 250). Its opposite is social structure, with its status and rank distinctions, complexity, and selfishness, to name just
some of its attributes (Turner, *Ritual Process* 106-09). In Iowa the conditions seemed to be set for communitas to emerge: the writers participating in the Program had been taken out of their ordinary environments, invited to organize their time by themselves, and thus liberated from "conformity to general norms"; the group that they formed was characterized by homogeneity of status and, to a large extent, simplicity of dress and behavior. True comradeship often defined the participants’ interaction, even if not all of them got along together well. Yet, there may have been at least one factor adversely influencing the emergence of communitas in the group. The sources reflect the frustration that Kijowski felt in Iowa not being able to communicate in English. As late as three months into his stay, Kijowski wrote to his wife, perhaps with some exaggeration: "Between me and the external world there is still a ‘screen’… of incomprehensibility. *I do not understand anything*. I do not understand conversations in films, television commentary, radio programs, or what people are saying to me…. I hide from people, which must make an awful impression on them” (*Dziennik 1970-1977* 200-201; original emphasis). He worked on his English but problems with communication would recur. It can be suspected that such involuntary absence (or significant restriction) of verbal communication among the members of the group – Kijowski was not the only person unable to speak English sufficiently well – may have made the emergence of communitas among the writers more difficult than it otherwise would have been.

Was there ordeal in Kijowski’s experience, as a liminal feature of pilgrimage? It seems so, although it was different from the physical effort that a traditional pilgrim makes. Acute inability to communicate, apparently lessened in time, seems to qualify under this category. In Iowa, before the arrival of his wife and the beginning of the trip around the country, there was also melancholy, loneliness and nostalgia.

Reflection on the basic cultural or religious values was certainly an important feature of Kijowski’s American experience. The stay in America offered ample opportunity for this. For instance, in the seclusion of his stay in Iowa, he pondered the role of men and women of letters in the modern world, and, evoking the concept of clerisy, he reached quite a radical Coleridgean-Eliotesque conclusion:

>We are in today’s world what priests and monks were in the old world: the people on which the world places all the troubles of spiritual life…. Culture is the religion of the modern world, and we are the clerisy of this religion, that is sacrificial animals whom rich societies feed and breed to convince themselves that they are cultured. And the poor ones do this in order to seem richer. (*Podróż* 91; original emphasis)

Contact with nature during the trip around the United States also often induced him to reflect on basic values. Traveling across a desert he thought critically of the modern
world: “Our lives are too gentle. Our civilization is too gentle. Everything falls into place
too simply…. We tame daemons and send gods into retirement. We do not answer im-
portant questions…. Our souls have paled. We are too secure; too sure of our existence;
we are too much embedded in it” (Podróż 193).

On return to Poland, Kijowski must have gone through a stage of reaggregation. The
analyzed sources contain no record of the time immediately after his departure from
Iowa: his book account ends when, having completed the tour of the United States, he
and his wife leave Iowa for good (May 1973); the published diary, after a late April 1973
entry from Houston, Texas, resumes only with a July 1973 entry written in Warsaw, Pol-
land. This does not mean, however, that nothing can be inferred about Kijowski’s reag-
gregation. Most importantly, his diary shows that, in agreement with the Turnerian
framework, back in Poland he returned to a stable point in the social structure: he re-
sumed work as an editor in Twórczość, and soon embarked on new writing projects. And
more than this. As it seems, in a manner similar to a religious pilgrim “entering into
a new, deeper level of existence than he has known in his accustomed milieu” (Turner
and Turner 8), Andrzej Kijowski was transformed by his American travel. Already dur-
during the journey he noticed changes taking place in him. Contact with nature during his
tour of the country repeatedly played a role in this. About his travel across a desert, he
wrote: “I keep looking through the window, as if I could see my thoughts in the empti-
ness out there. And in this emptiness – I grow, I purify myself, a superb order is created
within me and I feel important, significant, boundlessly energetic” (Podróż 192). Or in
Muir Woods, on seeing a cross-section of one of the giant trees: “Faced with these dates
written in small print into the rings of the sequoia, I felt quite a new joy of life and quite
a new, previously unknown, curiosity of the world. Oh, world, I thought, if you are rea-
ly worthy of delight and study, you are one” (Podróż 213). Admittedly, it is difficult to
assess how lasting these feelings were. Yet, their presence may indicate a deeper trans-
formation happening or about to happen: Dariusz Skórczewski suggests that the passage
recording the experience from Muir Woods prefigures Kijowski’s fundamental turn to-
wards the transcendental, visible in his later activities and writing (93). There were also
other, more tangible changes. During his stay, in time, Kijowski appears to have im-
proved his command of English, at first enough to communicate during the trip around
the United States (at this stage he abandons dramatic complaints about his English), and
then to correspond with friends in Iowa. Even more importantly, back in Poland, he

5 The correspondence between the Kijowskis and the Engles lasted from the 1970s into the 1980s (see
Andrzej Kijowski’s letter to Paul Engle, dated November 13, 1974, or Andrzej and Kazimiera’s letter
to Paul Engle and Hualing Nieh Engle, dated December 4, 1983). No indication has been found whether
Kijowski (or the Kijowskis) ever received any help with writing their English letters.

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Janusz Kuzniarczyk firmly lists America among his interests and occasionally comments upon developments in the United States. It may be remembered that he confessed that before the trip he did not really believe in America, and that he avoided things American, including American literature. Yet, writing about the moment when he arrived on the West Coast, a short time before his departure from the United States, he observes: “Going west all the time, I reached the Pacific Ocean, which turned out to be east of Warsaw. The Earth is really round – I thought to myself lazily… – and this is in fact the only thing that I wanted to know” (Podróż 203). Apparently he saw it, and he believed – in this, and in the reality of America. And he decided to write about his experience: first in installments for the literary weekly Literatura, and then to work on a book. A year after his return, writing in his diary about his idées fixes, he placed “America – the experience of space” high on his list (Dziennik 1970-1977 249). He certainly no longer avoided things American. In a way he brought America with him, in him, to Poland.

As the final question, one might want to ask if, in Kijowski’s personal experience, this was a journey from a mundane center to a sacred periphery (as Turner phrased it), or a journey in quest of a place embodying a valued ideal (in Morinis’s definition). Also here the answer seems to be positive, despite Kijowski’s pre-travel fears and the old wish not to know anything about America. For to him the place did embody a valued ideal, and had a certain sacred, mythical quality. Remembering his arrival in New York, he wrote:

The Empire State building… was built exactly when I was born…. And then everything that was extraordinary, came from here: records, inventions, oddities, cinema. It is New York, not Baghdad, that was my fable land, in which millionaires and film stars played the role of princes and princesses. Whatever happened to this myth afterwards, it has left at least this archaic layer that was enough to raise fever in me and in all those who would come here. (Podróż 29)

And America? This was the place where one could see one’s own life, so successful or so unsuccessful as it could be. As he wrote, “Each of us could be an American, because each of us strives for prosperity for which immigrants came here from all over the world. This country is a young group creation of humanity, a utopia of success, which has turned out so well – and at the same time so badly – as only a utopia can turn out” (Podróż 138). To Kijowski, America was a country where everything was possible; a country which, despite all its unresolved problems, many of which he noticed and commented upon, offered the freedom to live one’s life as one
wished. In some very important senses, a sacred periphery indeed for a citizen of communist Poland.

Briefly to conclude, the Turnerian model of processual analysis seems to offer a good framework in which to interpret and theorize Andrzej Kijowski’s encounter with the United States. Generally, it makes it possible to see the experience of travel within a broader perspective, one that includes also the pre-travel and post-return stages. Because of the particular historical and political conditions that defined Polish-American relations, and because of the more individual conditions in which Kijowski’s journey was made, it would seem that his cross-cultural travel can be seen more specifically as a form of pilgrimage. Even if not all the attributes of liminality posited for modern, liminoid pilgrimages were fully realized here (quite conspicuously, communitas appears to have been made difficult because of language problems during the Iowan phase of the stay), the analyzed sources contain a reflection of many such attributes present and experienced. It would seem that through his travel to the United States, Andrzej Kijowski, a bit to his own surprise, made a pilgrimage which returned him changed – as well as spiritually and intellectually richer – to his home society; a significant gain to a writer, critic, and a thinking and feeling, man.

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The inclusion of some of the criticisms may have also been an ingenious way for Kijowski to try to ease the passage of the book through the hands of state censors, who had to approve the book before it could be published.

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Dancing for Survival: Reinterpretations of the Ghost Dance in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes*

Even a brief glimpse of contemporary Native American literature reveals the fact that the nineteenth-century Ghost Dance movement belongs to the most frequently explored topics: Abby, a protagonist from Louis Owens’s *Bone Game*, cites the Ghost Dance history as an inspiration for her search of personal freedom; Mary Polatkin, a literature student in Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*, offers a visionary image in which the Ghost Dance is an act of vengeance against white people; in Louise Erdrich’s *The Master Butchers Singing Club*, the singing of German immigrants and people from a variety of cultural contexts is compared to the intertribal gathering of Ghost Dancers; in Linda Hogan’s latest novel, *People of the Whale*, an old grandmother of one of the protagonists dispels popular misconceptions about Wounded Knee. Noting the frequency with which Native writers return to this nineteenth-century religious movement, Gerald Vizenor, an Anishinaabe writer, announces the emergence of a “new ghost dance literature” in which “[t]he tribal characters dance with tricksters, birds, and animals, a stature that would trace the natural reason, coherent memories, transformations, and shadows in traditional stories.” “The shadows and language of tribal poets and novelists,” explains Vizenor, “could be the new ghost dance literature, the shadow literature of liberation that enlivens tribal survivance” (“The Ruins” 27-28). Vizenor defines “survivance” as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of Native stories… [which] are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry,” and finds its traces in texts which consciously subvert conventional portrayals of Indians produced and distributed by the mainstream culture (*Manifest Manners* vii). For Vizenor, “survivance” is more than literal survival as it entails not only a response to stereotypical presentations of Indians, but also an active participation in shaping the story of the Indian past as well as of the present moment.

Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Gardens in the Dunes*, seen as yet another example of “the new ghost dance literature,” revisits the events of the Ghost Dance and reinterprets them from a Native perspective which often, due to its controversial treatment of historical material, contrasts sharply with the official accounts. The historical text that Silko openly challenges in her novel is James Mooney’s *The Ghost Dance Religion and Wounded Knee* by the American anthropologist James Mooney. The literary and ideological strategy of Silko’s
reinterpretation of the Ghost Dance is the reversal of the binary logic proposed by Mooney in his text. While Mooney sees the Ghost Dance as advancing Indian assimilation to the white culture and thus emphasizes its conciliatory dimension, Silko portrays it as an act of resistance to the American colonization. In Mooney’s interpretation, Indians benefit from the Ghost Dance since it brings them closer to civilization. In *Gardens*, on the other hand, native tribes become cultural winners since they move away from Anglo-American influences.

The religious and social movement among western American tribes known as the Ghost Dance began around 1870 and, after showing signs of diminishing in the mid 1870s, went into its second phase in 1890. The Ghost Dance emerged as a response to severe demographic losses and cultural collapse. It originated in western Nevada near the Walker River Indian Reservation, but the 1890 movement covered a wider area, including the central part of the western United States, and involved a larger number of Indian tribes. The first Ghost Dance was initiated by a Paviotso man named Wodziwob, whereas the key figure of the second phase was a man from the same tribe, Wovoka, or “The Cutter,” also known as Jack Wilson. In 1886 or 1887 Wovoka experienced a vision in which he was told to instruct his people how to perform a special kind of dancing that would bring back their dead ancestors. The underlying principle of the Ghost Dance doctrine heralded the unification of all Indian tribes, living and extinct, the regeneration of the earth and a harmonious coexistence of all people. As Russell Thornton observes, the sources provide different answers to the question whether white people were included in or excluded from the vision (*We Shall* 6-7). As far as the rituals of the Ghost Dance are concerned, there were many variations, for instance, some tribes danced for several days, others for only one; some tribes danced around a tree or a pole that had been decorated beforehand; often special costumes and facial painting were added as the movement spread from tribe to tribe. One common feature for all ceremonies was that the Ghost Dance was always a circle dance. Both Ghost Dance movements lasted merely for a few years, suppressed by the authorities and gradually abandoned by the Native people as “ineffective.” In the case of the Sioux Ghost Dance, the movement was brutally quelled on December 29th 1890 at Wounded Knee, where over three hundred Sioux, mostly old people, women, and children, were killed.

*Gardens in the Dunes* revisits the second wave of the Ghost Dance movement in the American Southwest among the Paiute Indians. The events are presented through the eyes of the main protagonist, Indigo, an Indian girl from the Sand Lizard people, who participates in the ceremony at the moment when the Southwestern tribes are suffering from severe population losses, poverty, hunger, and cultural annihilation. Like the other Indians gathered for the dancing ceremony, Indigo and her family embrace the Ghost
Dance religion as a promise of hope and rebirth. In her evocation of the Ghost Dance, Silko shows the movement as a revolutionary and subversive impulse which ensures the continuation of Indian cultures and celebrates the native worldview. That Silko is not interested in historical veracity is visible in her presentation of the Sand Lizard tribe. Their portrayal depends on a combination of Silko’s literary imagination and her research done on the Colorado River people. Since her main goal was to present a tribe on the brink of extinction, she feared that the concern with a tribe that died out as a result of the contact with the white culture would inevitably necessitate addressing the historical causes of such genocide, and, obviously, undermine the revolutionary message of the text. As she explains in an interview with Ellen L. Arnold, she needed the “artistic and ethical freedom” to invent the tribe and its history, and thus escape the questions about “ethnographic accuracy” (172). Therefore, Silko’s reasons for a literary reconstruction of the Ghost Dance are manifold, but not necessarily historical.

The gesture of rejecting historical material is most visibly manifested in Silko’s dialogue with Mooney’s The Ghost Dance Religion and Wounded Knee, one of the most famous texts on the Ghost Dance. Interestingly, Silko’s intention to challenge Mooney’s account is signaled in her previous novel, Almanac of the Dead, where, in one of the concluding chapters, Wilson Weasel Tail talks about Mooney’s “misguided” text (Silko slightly modifies Mooney’s name):

Moody and other anthropologists alleged the Ghost Dance disappeared because the people became disillusioned when the ghost shirts did not stop bullets and the Europeans did not vanish overnight. But it was the Europeans, not the Native Americans, who had expected results overnight… Moody and the others had never understood the Ghost Dance was to reunite living people with the spirits of beloved ancestors lost in the five-hundred-year war. (722)

According to Silko, Mooney/Moody misunderstands the Ghost Dance in many different ways, however, his most serious error is that he pronounces it as ended. Considering the fact that Almanac culminates with the march of people who “seek nothing less than the return of all tribal lands,” then, indeed, the text’s message is that the Ghost Dance has just begun rather than disappeared.

When in 1891 James Mooney proposed an extensive analysis of the Ghost Dance to the Bureau of Ethnology for the Smithsonian, in a meticulously researched book, he intended to demystify the figure of Wovoka, the “messiah,” as he was often called, to interview him and thus to offer a more objective view of the entire movement. As Regier observes, Mooney was also interested in emphasizing the non-violent character of the Ghost Dance, the aspect that, after the massacre at, or using the nineteenth-century ter-
minology, the battle of Wounded Knee, was rarely explored and often doubted (137). His three-year study of the Ghost Dance movement among Native American tribes led him to the conclusion that Wovoka’s original message was peaceful and conciliatory in nature, encouraging assimilation with the white culture rather than open resistance.

From the introductory chapter, Mooney is intent upon demystifying the Ghost Dance movement, and underlines its universal character as an understandable human reaction to crisis. Mooney begins by pointing out that various cultures share a paradigm of civilizational collapse, which entails a predictable reaction: “The lost paradise is the world’s dreamland of youth. What tribe or people has not had its golden age, before Pandora’s box was loosed, when women and nymphs and dryads and men were gods and heroes?” (657). In times of crisis, people turn to their gods for help and hope. At such moments, the need for a leader or a prophet becomes even more crushing, which explains why average individuals suddenly acquire the status of messiahs or cultural heroes. For Mooney, this pattern transcends cultural and racial contexts, supporting the ethnographer’s idea of the Ghost Dance as non-violent and harmless to the whites. If, as Mooney writes, “The doctrines of the Hindu avatar, the Hebrew Messiah, the Christian millennium, and… the Indian Ghost Dance are essentially the same, and have their origin in a hope and longing to all humanity” (657), the distance between Anglo and Indian cultures becomes minimized and Indians themselves receive a more human face.

In order to authenticate his ethnographic theory of the non-violent Ghost Dance, Mooney returns to the movement’s source, that is the prophet Wovoka and his vision. Mooney succeeded in arranging an interview with Wovoka in January 1892 in the Mason Valley settlement. Throughout his description of the meeting, Mooney emphasizes Wovoka’s connections with the white culture: his English name, white man’s clothes and haircut, and familiarity with the Anglo code of conduct, thus stabilizing his identity and removing him from the mythical context in which he exists in the stories retold by Indian tribes. In the course of the interview, Wovoka emphasizes that his religion is the one of peace, that he encourages people to “be good and love one another, have no quarrelling, and live in peace with the whites.” When asked directly, he confirms his belief that “it was better for Indians to follow the white man’s road and to adopt the habits of civilization” (722). The description of the prophet corresponds with the presentation of the doctrine of the Ghost Dance offered in the next chapter of Mooney’s analysis. While there are differences when it comes to the rituals, the unifying element of the Ghost Dance among all tribes is its anti-war character: “Do no harm to any one. You must not fight” are the instructions found in the text of the message delivered to Wovoka by God (782). Considering the figure of Wovoka and his message, Mooney reaches the following conclusion:
The career of every Indian has been warpath. His proudest title has been that of warrior. His conversation by day and his dreams by night have been of bloody deeds upon the enemies of the tribe…. The thirst for blood and massacre seemed inborn in every man, woman, and child of every tribe. Now comes a prophet as a messenger from God to forbid not only war, but all the savors of war… and his teaching is accepted and his words obeyed by four-fifths of all warlike predatory tribes…. Only those who have known the deadly hatred that once animated Ute, Cheyenne, and Pawnee, one toward another, and are able to contrast it with their present spirit of mutual brotherly love, can know what the Ghost-dance religion has accomplished in bringing the savage into the civilization. It is such a revolution as comes but once in the life of a race. (783)

Clearly, the logical apparatus that Mooney is applying in his analysis is the binary logic of savagery and civilization. Such a framework of presentation allows one to see the Ghost Dance as “revolutionary” in the sense that it is a giant step in the process of assimilation into the white culture, all this in a non-violent and peaceful way.

Silko’s Gardens in the Dunes rejects this assimilationist framework and reverses the binary logic whereby it is the colonized who, defined by their agency, actively disrupt the colonial trope. In the novel, the Ghost Dance is never a vehicle for promoting assimilation with the dominant culture; rather, because of its selective syncretism, it ensures the preservation of Native identity and culture, enriched and transformed by foreign elements. As Joy Porter has pointed out, “in Gardens the focus rests with the irrepressible force of native resistance to the imposition of all things non-Indian” (57).

The central motif in Silko’s reenactment of the Ghost Dance in Gardens in the Dunes is the recognition of the ancient connection between the people and the earth, in both physical and metaphorical sense. During the ceremonial dancing in Needles, the dancers “were moving from right to left because that was the path followed by the sun” (26). It is not only the direction of dancing, however, that is of great importance, but also the movements themselves whose function is to emphasize the unity between the people and their environment. Indigo observes that the dancers “drag[ged] their feet lightly along the ground to keep themselves in touch with Mother Earth” (27). As the ceremony progresses, this touch becomes more and more intimate, it becomes a gesture of love and tenderness: “They danced slowly, careful to trail their feet gently to caress Mother Earth” (465, emphasis added). The songs sung by the dancers, which Silko borrows from Mooney’s ethnographic text, celebrate the beauty of landscape and, combined with the dancers’ movements, invite the earth to respond: “Indigo felt the Earth’s breathing through the soles of her feet” (30). Moreover, it is in nature that one should look for the
signs that the dancing is effective: “the wind was increasing; clouds moved rapidly across the sky… [and] the snow seemed to fall faster – a sign that Messiah and his family were on their way” (28, 464). The dancing, then, manages to recreate the ancient connection of the people and the earth, interrupted by the white man’s intervention. According to Amy Regier, the fact that the Ghost Dance reestablishes the balance between the people and the earth, even if only for the brief time of dancing, is of extreme significant since, as Gardens repeatedly demonstrates, the landscape of the Southwest had been irrevocably altered by industrialization and destruction of the ecosystem (141).

In Silko’s interpretation, however, the Ghost Dance ceremony is not derived from Native cultures only. Her presentation of Wovoka prophet signals the incorporation of Christian and Gnostic elements into the Native narrative of the sacred dance. The dancers gathered near Needles witness a return of Wovoka, who is accompanied by Jesus, wearing a white coat with red stripes and moccasins, the Holy Mother, and their eleven children. In an interview with Arnold, Silko confesses to her fascination with Gnosticism and the idea that, as she puts it, “there are lots of different Jesus Christ, and the Jesus of the Messiah of the Ghost Dance and some of the other sightings of the Holy Family in Americas were just as valid and powerful as other sightings and versions of Jesus” (164).

Repeating the Biblical story, the coming of the Messiah is again caused by (white) people’s sinful mistreatment of the earth. Interestingly, it is Jesus who insists on punishing white people, never the Indians. This visionary scene of the coming of the Messiah abounds in examples of how Silko interweaves Christian and Native stories into one fabric of the Ghost Dance narrative: in a kind of a tribal version of the Biblical story about the manna from the heaven, the Holy Mother opens her shawl and distributes orange squash blossoms among the hungry dancers. Moreover, it is Jesus who instructs people on the importance of dancing which will lead to the purification of the earth and their own reconnection with the dead ancestors. In this way, as Potter has observed, the Ghost Dance is presented not as an adoption or a mechanical repetition by the Indians of a completely alien religion, but “as a lived example of superior native spirituality whose impulse is to include rather than exclude, to expand relationships, broaden community and to foster positive reciprocal connections between land, plants, animals and peoples, regardless of heritage” (61).

Indeed, Silko’s version of the Ghost Dance is a religion of inclusion which erases racial boundaries and establishes connections between various marginalized groups. The gathering near Needles is attended by Indians representing different tribes, and also, there are Mormons among its active participants. According to Garold Barney, at the time evoked in the novel, the Ghost Dance became increasingly popular among the Mormons, who were also awaiting the coming of the Messiah and believed that “the
American Indians represent the descendants of the lost tribes of the House of Israel” (2-3). In *Gardens*, not only are the Mormons accepted to the ceremony without hostility, but they also experience the coming of their ancestors and the Messiah’s blessing. Moreover, as Indigo observes, suppressing the initial feeling of fear at the sight of white people among the dancers, “painted with white clay and wrapped in white robes, the Mormons looked like all the others” (29). This vision of ideal understanding, above and despite racial and cultural boundaries, is further enhanced by the dissolution of linguistic differences. To Indigo’s surprise, the Messiah’s message is understood by all the dancers regardless of the languages they speak. The Ghost Dance ceremony and the appearance of the Messiah in Needles lead to the introduction of the pre-Babel universal language, “the language of love which all people can understand because we are all the children of Mother Earth” (32). Thus the ceremony becomes a phenomenal act of unification in which different groups are able to communicate, while retaining all their distinct features.

Boundaries, whether physical, temporal, linguistic or cultural, seem ineffective and artificial in the light of Silko’s description of the Ghost Dance. After escaping from the Sherman Institute at Riverside, young Indigo accompanies Hattie and Edward Palmer, the Anglo-American couple, on their trip to England and Italy. This international travel, however, is not merely a prolongation of Indigo’s separation with her sister. Instead, it becomes an enlightening experience of tracing mythical interconnections between Old European and Native American cultures, at the same time following the eastern movement of Wovoka, the Messiah and his family. In the course of the journey, Indigo and the Palmers visit a Corsican village famous for the apparition of the Blessed Mother on the wall of a local school. While for Edward the event is yet another example of primitive superstitions, for Indigo, it becomes a confirmation that “The farther east they traveled, the closer they came to the place of the Messiah and his family” (321). As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the connections between Old Europe and Native America are by no means coincidental, and the presence of the spirit of the Ghost Dance can be felt on both continents. As David L. Moore points out, “The western and southern hemispheres join in mythic conspiracy to pre-empt the colonial project” (111). Once more, in a celebratory tone, *Gardens* draws a vision of Native cultures as defying geographical, political and cultural divisions.

Finally, the culmination of the Ghost Dance ceremony at the end of the novel challenges Mooney’s claim about the movement’s failure to fulfill Indian hopes for the regeneration of Native culture, and its consequent disappearance. Even though the last gathering of the dancers is disrupted by soldiers, the ceremony does not prove ineffective. Prior to the night of the Ghost Dance, Hattie suffers a brutal assault and rape. When she
discovers the perpetrator’s livery stable, she sets it on fire which spreads to the entire town of Needles:

The next morning a line of blue-gray smoke still rose above the town . . . and they [Indigo and her sister] got to watch the white town burn to the ground. Or maybe it was only the town dump – they didn’t know until they flagged down the mail wagon and loaded their belongings. The driver said it was no joke – half the town of Needles burned that night, though no one was hurt. (473)

In this ironic conclusion of the Ghost Dance, the destruction of the white people (or white people’s property) does not come from the hands of Indians, but Hattie, a representative of the privileged group. The Sand Lizard sisters, on the other hand, return unscathed to the ancient gardens, and their exposure to the influence of foreign cultures only facilitates the survival of their own culture, less fragile than it would seem. Thus, Silko’s Ghost Dance becomes a metaphor of survival whose main components are cultural syncretism and selective adaptation. In this celebratory reinterpretation of the movement, however, Silko never addresses the questions lurking in the closing scene of the novel: while the Ghost Dance movement ensures survival thanks to its cultural inclusiveness, the Sand Lizard culture endures since the sisters return to the ancient gardens and enjoy a relative separation from the white world. The question about the very possibility of such a separation at the turn of the twentieth century, and about the consequences of its loss, remain outside Silko’s literary dialogue with the Ghost Dance.

WORKS CITED


REVIEWS


A Monument to the Usher: On Two Co-memorative Collections in-scribed to Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz

Preface: The Arch Usher/The Sub-Sub

Generations of Melville scholars have marveled over the significance of “Etymology” and “Extracts”: two dangerous supplements, which, together with the “Epilogue,” provide a unique frame to Moby-Dick – once a “rhapsody run mad,” and today a central text of the Western literary canon. Each of the “supplements” erects a monument to a figure of unassuming posture, almost invisible and seemingly marginal if juxtaposed with the “godlike-ungodly” Ahab, yet central to contemporary acts of readings. The Sub-Sub Librarian, the least significant figure of the whole ever-underrated librarianship responsible for the shape and organization of the world-wide repository of knowledge, has gone through the long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth in an impossible effort to offer the potential seekers the completeness of knowledge. Dedicating himself to a task whose magnificent failure has allowed his followers to realize its ultimate ungraspability, he defies the looming of final certainty. The pale Usher to a Grammar School, as the harbinger of the Sub-Sub’s failure, supplies transience to all principles of understanding, with serene resignation.

Yet, the Usher certainly is not a simple gatekeeper: after all, the Grammar School is also a School of Grammar. It is an institution, whose students explore the intricate mat-

[The pale Usher—threadbare in coat, body and brain; I see him now. He was ever dusting his old lexicons and grammars, with a queer handkerchief, mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of the known nations of the world. He loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality.] [Melville]
While you take in hand to school others, and to teach them by what name a whale-fish is to be called in our tongue, leaving out, through ignorance, the letter H, which almost alone maketh up the signification of the word, you deliver that which is not true. [Hackluyt]

ters of correctness/incorrectness of expression in language, in which not even a mute letter, a symbol meriting no pronunciation, is to be neglected. They study the rules of language which “maketh up the signification” of the wor(l)d. Ushering the students in, rather than keeping them out, the gatekeeper of knowledge is well aware that all lexicons and grammars must eventually grow old; dusting the old compendia of outdated principles, he beholds adepts, engaging in heated debates, with a serene smile. They will understand the mortality of grammars when the time is ripe, too, and like him, they will, in time, appreciate the old grammars, as they supply subsequent ἔτυµον λόγος, new “true words,” new “true arguments,” to the generations to come.

Andrzej Kopcewicz, who “did not care to draw in any way public applause”(“Will you tell me”?), ushered in three generations of Polish Americanists; having graduated from his School of Grammar, they gained a self-awareness that they now share with their own students. It therefore comes as no surprise that Janusz Semrau should wish to open his prefaces to both collections with Melvillean mottos.

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It will be seen that this mere painstaking burrower and grubworm of a poor devil of a Sub-Sub appears to have gone through the long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth, picking up whatever random allusions to whales he could anyways find in any book whatsoever, sacred or profane. Therefore you must not, in every case at least, take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology. Far from it. As touching the ancient authors generally, as well as the poets here appearing, these extracts are solely valuable or entertaining, as affording a glancing bird’s eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many nations and generations, including our own. [Melville]

Indeed, “Forty years of whaling,” a quotation introducing the selection of texts included in *American Literature in Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 1968 – 2008*, aptly corresponds to the central idea of *Moby-Dick*’s “dangerous” supplement. The forty years Andrzej Kopcewicz dedicated to his academic and pedagogical work at the School of English of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań were the years of his unswerving chase for the ever-evasive whale-of-sense. Likewise, the four decades between 1968 and 2008, in the course of which many of his Students and Colleagues had gone through the
long Vaticans and street-stalls of the earth seeking knowledge, gave birth to the hereby presented “extracts,” painstakingly compiled by Janusz Semrau: a representative fraction of what the community of Polish and international Americanists, contributing, over time, to *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, have “promiscuously said, thought, fancied and sung” of a plethora of aspects of American letters.

This volume commemorates the continual presence of American literature in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* since its founding in 1968. Safely over the formidable quota of three-score and ten, the number of contributions on American literature in a yearly devoted predominantly to linguistics itself is a cause for modest celebration and an opportune pretext for a selective revival. The present essays have been selected and revised for the commemorative re-issue with a view of reflecting (i) as broad a range of authors, themes, genres and critical methods as possible, (ii) the international character of the journal, (iii) something of a history of the Department of American Literature at the School of English at A. Mickiewicz University. The essays are arranged chronologically in order of their original appearance, appended with the bibliography of all publications relating to American literature in SAP between 1968 and 2008. (7)

Thus arranged, the book gains a dimension which renders it much more than a valuable collection of re-issued articles, a historical summary of the Americanist presence in one of the most respected learned journals of Poland, or a conventional *Festschrift*. In fact, Semrau, albeit belittling his own achievement by reducing his “Preface” to a mere triplet of brief paragraphs, has managed to compile a monument of a volume. The collection not only offers a variety of chronologically arranged, excellent academic texts, thereby narrating the story of the evolution of the dominant theoretical and methodological trends lending shape to (and shaped by) Polish American studies, but also testifies to the significance of the intellectual legacy of the mentor of the discipline. It is, after all, Andrzej Kopcewicz’s students (often holding professorial titles today) and colleagues (from all over the world) who penned the majority of the essays making up the collection. Indeed, “A man lives for so long as we carry him inside us” (Brian Patten quoted in Semrau, 7) – and the contents of *American Literature in Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 1968 – 2008* certainly confirm the validity of this statement.

The book opens with Kopcewicz’s study of “Poe’s Philosophy of Composition” (1968), in which the idea underlying the critical stance professed by the author of “The Raven” is analyzed in the context of its “amazing resemblance to Eliot’s concept of the objective correlative – the single most important aspect of his depersonification theory
and of symbolic forms in poetry” (12). Nearly three hundred pages and forty years later, the volume closes with a 2008 essay by Jørgen Veisland on Philip Roth’s *The Human Stain.*” Needless to say, the author’s analytical tools, markedly different from those fascinating scholars in 1968, are symptomatic of the development of the discipline. As Veisland declares, his tools include:

a selection of excerpts form the Danish poet Søren Ulrik Thomsen, from pre-Socratic philosophy (specifically Heraclitus’ remarks on fusion and diffusion), Kenneth Burke’s philosophy of literary form; Nietzsche’s concept of grades, degrees and opposition; Derrida’s concept of totality and excess; Kristeva’s concept of abjection; and… Roth’s own aesthetic reflection and philosophy of language and subjectivity as they appear implicitly in the text. (313)

Texts located between the thus designated “chronological” poles represent a wide spectrum of methodological and theoretical approaches, whose centrality changed over time, beginning with New Criticism, structuralism and semiotics, to early attempts at deconstructivist reading and full-fledged poststructural theories. Hence, following the opening essay, the editor (aptly!) offers his readers Marta Sienicka’s text dedicated to the immanent poetics of “William Carlos Williams and some younger poets” (1972), Teresa Balazy’s “soteriologico-critical” article on Flannery O’Connor’s *Wise Blood* (1977), George Sebouhian’s study of mythographic discourses underlying apocalyptic narratives (1980), Stephen H. Goldman’s important analysis of cultural mechanisms responsible for the association formed between the genre of science fiction and discourses of Americanness (1981). Next comes Khalil Husni’s classic phenomenological/metaphysical essay “Ishmael’s leviathanic vision: A study in whiteness” (1981), followed by Marek Wilczyński’s innovative “misreading” of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown”, following deconstructive procedures (1988), and Marshall Walker’s reflections on edenic utopias, poetics and historical material in “Robert Penn Warren, Audubon, and imagination” (1989).

These articles are further complemented by three contributions by Americanists from Maria Curie Skłodowska University of Lublin: Jerzy Durczak’s on Ihab Hassan’s “paracritical” autobiography (1992), Joanna Durczak’s on David Wagoner’s “experimental didacticism” (1992), and Jerzy Kutnik’s on John Cage’s musical holism, decentralization

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1 Andrzej Kopciewicz and Marta Siemicka have become the landmark Americanist tandem to most, if not all, Polish students of American literature owing to the publication of *Historia literatury Stanów Zjednoczo-
nych w zarysie*, tom 1 i 2 (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1983), a canonical coursebook used in the Polish academic classroom.
of the Western discourses and poetic experimentation (1992). Next, Alan H. Pope comments on “Lexical repetition in American poetry” (1992), and Janusz Semrau on Walter Abish’s “playful dialogue” with George Painter’s conceptualization of Marcel Proust’s oeuvre (1992). The volume’s “intermezzo” is the “Postscriptum” to the previous essay: Semrau’s interview with Walter Abish. The interlocutors raise issues concerning the position of the author of *Alphabetical Africa* in the American literary arena in the light of the “anxiety of influence,” tropes of sexuality, politics and humor characteristic to his oeuvre, as well as his unique writerly strategies.

The second part of the collection begins topically with K. Narayana Chandran’s study of Donald Barthelme’s allusions to T. S. Eliot’s poetry in the story “Great days” (1995) and Andrzej Kopciewicz’s “paradigmatic reading” of “the machine” in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas Pynchon (1995). These two studies in self-reflexivity are then followed by Steven Carter’s “A note on Robert Frost and Ernest Hemingway,” a brief observation on the game of complementarity understood in terms of non-resolvability of the duality of interpretive potential (1997). Next comes Magdalena Zapędowska’s exploration of Emily Dickinson’s poetics of renunciation, in which absence manifests itself as the principle of the organization of the spatial structure of the poet’s universe (1999), followed by Agnieszka Rzepa’s gendered analysis of Anne Rice’s characters in the context of the transformations of the concepts of masculinity and femininity in contemporary popular culture of the United States.

Rice’s thematic preoccupations offer a convenient bridge linking Rzepa’s insightful analysis with Marek Wilczyński’s attempt (2001) to “redeem” Annie Trumbull Slosson’s underrated writing by locating it at the crossroads of the tradition of “literary scripturism,” the “standard American psycho-gothic” and the genre of the “spirit of the place,” thus reinscribing her within the canon of female domestic Gothicism. Contributing his voice to the debate on American literary canon, Janusz Semrau (2006) offers a complex analysis of the “hypercanonized” *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a cultural phenomenon and of the novel’s eponymous hero as a figure inseparably twined with the evolving concept of the American identity. Through a reference to John Gower’s *Mirour de l’Omme*, Semrau presents the novel as America’s unique looking glass, a discourse both revelatory of, and tributary to the American (moral) character.

The last two texts in the space between the mentioned chronological poles are the 2008 essays by Paulina Ambroży-Lisz on Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein, identifying the elements of *écriture feminine* in American letters back to the onset of modernism, and by Joseph Kuhn on irony and the eclogue in the poetry of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, tracing the transformations of the traditional, allegedly extinct, pastoral genre.
Jørgen Veisland’s closing essay is followed by a seven-page, comprehensive bibliography of articles published in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* between 1968-2008, compiled by the editor of the volume, Janusz Semrau. Addressing a wide variety of aspects of culture in a time-frame spanning pre-colonial and post-contemporary America, the texts have been contributed by leading Polish and international Americanists representing three generations of scholars, a solid contingent of whom were once “ushered in” by none other but Andrzej Kopcewicz – and have continued his passionate chase for the ungraspable ever since.

The other collection edited by Janusz Semrau, “*Will you tell me any thing about yourself?*” Co-memorative Essays on Heman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener,” although founded upon a very different set of assumptions, is likewise in-scribed to the memory of Andrzej Kopcewicz: “*facile princeps* – a scribe easily preeminent and indisputably first in our field (*scribe*: a person who could read and write)” (8). The inscription, however, unlike in the case of the *American Studies in Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, is a purposefully decentralized homage. Almost concealed in the footnote to Semrau’s introductory essay, it is steals away from the main body of the text, thus allowing the editor to bring to the forefront the continuous presence of the “preeminent scribe,” rather than his absence. Such a maneuver throws the tangibility of the latter’s intellectual contribution into a much sharper relief, embodied in the opening essay of the provocative, erudite collection under an equally provocative and erudite title.

Indeed, rather then commemorate the eminent mentor, the authors of the texts included in the volume join him in a collective, albeit individually exercised, effort of memory. Co-memoration is hence effected through critical acts of reading, which not only involve remembering and recalling, but also the revision of the significance of the self-effacing commemoratory inscription: the footnote inscription, ultimately, renders itself null and void. Presence effaces absence. And hence, the only absence looming large as central presence in each of the meticulously selected texts in the collection, is that of “Bartleby”/Bartleby; a dead letter; a scrivener; a (proto)photocopier; The Story, who would prefer not to.

This, however, does not exhaust the interpretive potential of the multi-dimensional title. Far from it: *Will you tell me any thing about yourself?* – apparently – is a question as haunting as it is self-contradictory. “Silence permeates all things,” Melville writes, “it brooded upon the face of the waters” before the world *was*, before the first word *named* that, which previously had been inconceivable, ineffable and thus non-existent. Telling *things* reveals itself as a lexical non-sequitur, unless the *thing* is a letter, which, until read out, remains silent and dead. Bartleby “unread” must remain a sequence of dead letters; silence, permeating them, permeates him. That, which calls him into uneasy, ambivalent,
cumbersome existence is an act of reading, which carves him into memory, co-memorates him with other memories, reshaping him, revising him, reinventing him in an unending hermeneutic exercise. This, I believe, is what the title of the demanding, yet intellectually entertaining, brilliantly focused, yet methodologically diversified collection promises, and the book certainly lives up to its title. All things considered, anyone familiar with the “Story of Wall-Street” should know better: the authors of the subsequent articles will not tell him or her anything about Bartleby.

Co-memorating Bartleby seems to require a semblance of an act of conversion. By virtue of its reference to St. Augustine’s Confessions, the title of Janusz Semrau’s introductory essay (“Tolle lege, tolle lege!”) seems to suggest that Bartleby – who, after all, is the story – simply must be read in order to exist. Yet, once the act of reading commences, is its “impossible to dememorate him as a matter of indifference.” The reader, mesmerized, becomes a convert, co-memorating Bartleby as a matter of (in)difference: “A faint compositional echo of the authors own piazza tales strung together for book publication in 1856 – ‘Bartleby’s proper send-off into the world, C.O.D. – the present essays, written independently over a period of time, are markedly different in method, style, focus, scope, and length” (9).

Their divergent perspectives notwithstanding, the seven essays remain in an unending dialog. Contrary to Janusz Semrau’s provocative claim, shedding light unto one another, overlapping, or veering off to go separate ways, the reflections proposed by the seven excellent scholars are anything but sideways reflections. On the contrary: each of them seems to be a head-on reflection, or more precisely, a head(s)-first plunge into a flickering co-memorative reflection of Bartleby, the ungraspable phantom of life. If no unquestionable, unchangeable grammar of Bartleby exists, even a meandering argument cannot be, with any degree of certainty, dubbed as sideways, unless all of them, with identical adequacy, merit the term.

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All profound things, and emotions of things are preceded and attended by Silence. Why a silence is that which with the pale bride precedes the responsive I will, to the priest’s solemn question, Wilt thou have this man for thy husband? In silence, too, the wedded hands are clasped. Yea, in silence the child Christ was born into the world. Silence is the general consecration of the universe. Silence is the invisible laying on of the Divine Pontiff’s hands upon the world. Silence is at once the most harmless and the most awful thing in all nature. It speaks of the Reserved Forces of Fate. Silence is the only Voice of our God.

Nor is this so august Silence confined to things simply touching or grand. Like the air, Silence permeates all things, and produces its magical power, as well during that peculiar mood which prevails at a solitary traveller’s first setting forth on a journey, as at the unimaginable time when before the world was, Silence brooded on the face of the waters. [Melville]
Janusz Semrau’s exhortative “Tolle lege” (circumferentially) invites the central metaphor of the opening essay of the volume: Andrzej Kopcewicz’s “Dark Rooms and Bartleby.” The “intertextual reading” revolves around the idea of narrative centers and circumferences, not incidentally reminiscent of the traditional concept of God as a circle, whose center is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere – a concept, which Ralph Waldo Emerson in his *Circles* attributed to none other but St. Augustine.² The self-deconstructive idea powers the hermeneutic “x-ray,” which, penetrating stacked texts of Auster’s *New York Trilogy*, Melville’s *The Confidence-Man*, Emerson’s “Over-Soul,” Borges’s “The God’s Script,” Poe’s “William Wilson”, Hawthorne’s *Fanshawe*, Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* and, eventually, *Bartleby the Scrivener*, uncovers a palimpsest, “made up of… a handful of images: a tower, a dark room, a temple, a prison – all written into the formula of the center and the circumference” (21). These images “mirror, complement, and negate one another,” entering into a sylleptic relationship within the intertextual frame. In such a context, the apparently incompatible meanings, rather than cancelling each other out, invite the intertext into the hermeneutic process, as an *interpretant* of the Peircean triad. Such an understanding of the dynamics of the palimpsest narrative “assumes a reciprocal, loop-like reading, since the intertext may also be informed by the text that it interprets in the discourse of intertextual transactions” (21). This hermeneutic formula allows Kopcewicz to bring his argument to the point in which he brilliantly demonstrates the function of “Bartleby the Scrivener” as a sylleptic intertext in Paul Auster’s *New York Trilogy*.

The images of the tower, temple and prison, central to in Kopcewicz’s erudite essay, bridge his argument with that offered by Joseph Kuhn, whose inspiring study, “Bartleby in Egypt,” relies upon Hegelian understanding of architectural/sculptural figurations in the history of culture. In his analysis, Kuhn draws upon the idea of Symbolic Art, which the German philosopher presents as

designating the first historical phase in the development of art, one that is found in India, Persia and especially in Egypt. It precedes the fuller, more translucent manifesta-

² Cf.: Alan de Lille’s “geometrical” definition of God in *Regulae, seu Maxime theologicae*: “Deus est sphaera intelligibilis, eius centrum ubique, circumferentia nusquam” in comparison with “Deus est sphæra infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia vero nusquam” in *Liber de XXIV philosophorum* by Hermes Trismegistus. The concept was later adopted by theologians such as Nicholas of Cusa in *De docta ignorantia*, II, cap.2 (“God is like an infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere”) and Pascal (“God is a circle; His centre is everywhere, His circumference is nowhere”). Also, cf. Giordano Bruno’s claim: “We can assert with certainty that the universe is all centre, or that the centre of the universe is everywhere and its circumference is nowhere.” Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 247.
tion of subjectivity in the art object that is evident in the classical (Greek) art and romantic (Christian, German) phases. In the schema of Hegel’s western-moving translation imperii that underlies Aesthetics the human spirit recognizes itself with increasing understanding through it’s objectification in art, which is to say through symbols. (32)

With its starting point in the architectural rhetoric of “Bartleby” – involving frequent references to the gone-by orders of Rome, Greece, Carthage and Egypt – Kuhn’s argument evolves along the Hegelian line, allowing him to finally present Melville’s story in the light of the essential conflict between the Greek aesthetic principle, represented by the narrator, and “modern-Egyptian” aesthetics, represented by the enigmatic scrivener. Kuhn’s reading calls into existence a “hieroglyphic Bartleby,” whose “opacity” he explains thus:

Bartleby, as a preeminently urban being, begins as a creature of script and of the ‘noble’ science of legibility, but he is eventually sealed up in architectural form and in a glaze of meaning. He dies with ‘his dim eyes… open’… because, at the story’s final moment of revelation, everything his careful speech has said has ‘sunk’ back into this glaze and remains fixed in his eyes. (40)

The crisis of communication is thus presented as a function of the inapplicability of the aesthetic paradigm of Symbolic Art to later discourses, including those central to the Jacksonian era. The conflict, however, seems to simultaneously relate to what could (at least from the perspective of the narrator) be perceived as the crisis of representation. Such an assumption also underlies the central argument of the insightful study of the “Narrative uses of medical discourse in ‘Bartleby’ and Billy Budd” by Marek Paryż, whose point of departure is Stephanie P. Browner’s observation concerning the affinity of the (professionalized) discourses of nineteenth-century literature and medicine, in which “the somatic” and “the narrative” would both parallel and complement each other. The synergic effect of these two discursive domains is the emergence of a self-debarring meta-narrative, indicating the contextualization of the structure of a literary work in the central metadiscourses, responsible for the perceived shape of the extra-literary world.

In his analysis of “Bartleby” and Billy Budd, Paryż returns to theoretical propositions of Michel Foucault, looming large in his previous work. In the present study, however, particularly useful is the Foucauldian concept of the “narrative of exclusion” and his understanding of the language of literature in terms of the “interplay of mirrors,” a concept somewhat reminiscent of the mise en abyme, which Kopcewicz introduces as an
alternative to syllepsis in his intertextual reading discussed above, yet – if I read Paryż consistently – applied by him to the intratextual, albeit not intraliterary, analysis. Thus positioned, the article demonstrates that

the language of medicine provides succor to Melville’s narrators who appear to have reached the limits of their speech. They seem to have experienced an epistemological crisis that becomes translated into narrative through the stylistic and structural complications as well as through the modifications of tone. It is, as if, within the space of the text, the imminent death of narration were replaced by the actual death of the hero. (44)

Compellingly (as he would), Marek Paryż offers what might be treated as a point of departure for a much-needed analysis of subsequent stages in the advancement of Melville’s existentialism in terms of the transmogrification of his antebellum rhetoric of romantic figurations of reality into a rhetoric leaning toward post-war pragmatic scrutiny of its narrative foundations.

Marek Paryż’s shift toward intratextuality seems to have paved the path for a study of “Bartleby” as “the scrivener,” which becomes the focus of a brilliantly provocative text by Tadeusz Rachwał – “Undeliverables. A response to Bartleby.” The author, not without a pinch of deconstructivist humor, opens his – as is predictable – “undeliverable response” with a motto from the Wikipedia definition of “scrivener” as “a text editor designed for writers.” The motto, complemented by the famous quote “He’s a real nowhere man” from the eponymous evergreen by the Lennon/McCartney tandem, induces the discourse decentralizing the (alleged) subject, perhaps ironically collapsed into the object of letter-writing:

Letters do not receive their addressees for various reasons. One of them is, of course, the death of the addressee, of the recipient of the correspondence, those letters that will remain unanswered, ‘unresponded’ to. A response to a letter, to writing, testifies to one’s living on, and it is perhaps this living on that Roland Barthes, a long time ago now, enlivened through his declaration of the death of the author, thus also slightly disturbing any straightforward understanding of correspondence. Letters are dead without readers, and Bartleby’s alleged work in a Dead Letter Office might well have been a lesson of undeliverable reading, a reading that could not consolidate into a response. (57)

Lucid and disciplined, the analysis consistently relies upon the interplay between the idea of Bartleby being a scrivener, i.e. an entity written in a programming language and
thus a product of its grammar; upon the double-entendre of the word “letter” alternately invoking the mutually exclusive senses of an “alphanumeric symbol” and of the “product of epistolography,” upon the phraseology of “death” in the fixed phrase “a dead letter” and in the concept of the “death of the author,” and, finally, upon the etymological affinity of the words “lesson” and “reading.”

Rachwał’s reading activates further oscillations: writing, especially academic, as inevitable copying of originals lacking originality (where that which is original occupies a position of authority) plays on the “authoritative” power of the “original” in the context of legal documents formulated on the basis of other, almost identical, documents. This, in turn, feeds back to the idea of the “scrivener” as a computer program, which “contains a document, note and “metadata” managing system allowing the user to keep track of notes, concepts, research and whole documents for reference,” feeding back to Bartleby as a copyist, who does not interpret the letters he reads, thus leaving them dead, and himself, if “unread” is a chain of dead letters. Since “a written response to a text, to a writing, to a letter, it is exactly an undeliverable act of reading,” and since “the I of the one who writes I is not the same as the I which is read by you,” a response to such a letter must inevitably be undeliverable: Bartleby, as a letter, cannot be addressed in either, or both senses of the double-entendre squared, ultimately rendering the correspondence another dead letter.

Simultaneously, as a computer program, the “scrivener” embodies the third order of simulacra, thus entering yet another discourse of a copy-without-the-original, which further advances the collapse of the “preferred” position of an original as opposed to a copy which, albeit lacking the authority of the original, must be identical to it. This idea ushers in the concept of the “origin of the original” and invokes the discourse of technical reproducibility, returning, on the one hand, to the digital technology of the “scrivener,” and tied to the notions of modernity and progress, which land the interpreter face to face with the walls of Wall Street, the epitome of early capitalism and further objectification of the subject.

Since his arrival in the law office at Wall Street, walled-in by the language always different from itself, Bartleby chooses to be stationary/stationery: not only a pre-lapsarian page, but also one “topographically” fixed at his workplace, an “inhuman” object whose “land” thus a “no-man’s-land,” yet an essentially homeless, originless, unbiographable “nowhere man,” whose obstinate “I would prefer not to” bears a marker of conditionality and, simultaneously places future in the past. The verbalized protest, which in the presented world, where “scrivening” rules galore, is not a written protest. As such, it is the voice, which as Derrida quoted by Rachwał asserts, “brings outside the inside” without abandoning the outside, and “conserving the inside while putting it out-
side” thus giving “existence, Dasein, to internal representations … makes the concept of the signified exist” (66). This allows the author to suggest an interim conclusion to his, notwithstandingly, undeliverable response: “Melville’s story seems to explore this complexity of the delivery of the signified, the violence of language producing undelivered messages, still promising a final delivery. Language feeds on signifieds Bartleby would prefer not to consume or materialize, which is the source of the narrator’s ‘continual misunderstanding’” (66).

Bartleby’s refusal to “consume” translates to his life “without dining,” which inevitably must end in death, or – more precisely – leads back to the death, the primary attribute of the (undeliverable) letter, which step keeps the hermeneutic circle endlessly rolling. And even though the article is an “undeliverable” reading of an “undeliverable” letter promising to be an “undeliverable” response to the former, it certainly offers a most enjoyable, often humorous, yet most seriously committed, eye-opening read.

Equally challenging is the erudite article by Janusz Semrau: a fifty-five-page long – arguably successful – attempt to dislodge the “undecidability, helplessness, worklessness, incompleteness, dissipation, scriptlessness and loss” from their privileged positions and to offer an alternative reading. Semrau proposes an interpretation somewhat reinforcing his own statement from the introductory essay, “Tolle lege, tolle lege!”: “in its textual propria persona, ‘Bartleby’ is not beyond decipherment. The narrative is not an impossible ‘boulder rolled down on the reading public’… and it is no baga de secretis sealed with seven seals” (8). The author, almost literally, “unpacks” the alleged “bag of secrets.” Alleged, because the rather powerful comparison does invoke, albeit via negation, documents relating to high treason, or – more specifically – what has been construed as high treason in the light of the laws gone-by. Teasingly, the author purports the “unambiguity” of the text “spelt out in black and white,” yet dedicates fifty five pages to the interpretation to its allegedly “non-treacherous” contents. “Unpacking” the text, he unpacks the “bag,” which seems to contain more than is describable in less than the length of the article, and in his act of writing, he shares the secrets unavailable to other eyes: the secrets his eyes construed. He reveals the secrets without fear of punishment (!), yet if the contents of the bag were available to all, spelling them out would obviously be a vain exercise. Moreover: the idea of domestication, inevitably, implies the notions of uncouth wildness, an obvious epitome of the unknown, the incomprehensible, the terrifying, the gothic. That these concepts largely overlap with, or involve, the idea of a “secret” seems to be beyond contestation, at least in the popular sense of the word. Hence, the starting point of the article is rooted in the presupposition that “Bartleby,” in fact, is a mystery and, as such, calls for a positive solution. In other words, the “treachery” needs to be brought to light.
These introductory remarks already suggest that the scope of Semrau’s essay is vast, as it must be, if prefaced by the following Heideggerian motto: “all questions that do justice to the subject are themselves bridges to their own answering. Essential answers are always but the last step in our questioning. The last step, however, cannot be taken without the long series of first and next steps” (69). The long series of first steps involves the identification of the dominant tendencies in reading “Bartleby” in terms of “negativity,” the delineation of narrative configurations conducive to such readings and the mapping out of potential parallels in other narratives, American and otherwise. This, eventually, leads to (juris)prudential/prudent, matter-of-fact revision of all of the textualized “propositions” in terms of their proneness to- and potential of legitimation/disregard – both within the presented world, and outside of it. Meticulously, gradually, in a multifaceted fashion, Semrau uncovers the un-concealed “secrets” of the text long proclaimed “enigmatic.”

The critic “demystifies the mystical” and domesticates the “un-heimlich” which process, irrespective of the awe-inspiring vastness of documentation, references, allusions, erudite range of contextualizations, proves to be… as refreshing as it is entertaining. Semrau’s text, attempting perhaps to “can the uncanny,” may be read as an elaborate, self-conscious, intellectual pleasantry, leveled at the established learned tradition of reverently reading “Bartleby” in “negative” terms. At the same time, as a tongue-in-cheek attempt to deflate the pompous, loftily dignified, almost “automatized” tradition, the endeavor collapses upon itself in the light of the legitimation of the very need to document a (juris)prudential reading with tens of footnotes supporting a meticulously built methodological frame. Hence, even though the “aletheia” supersedes the “aporia,” the allegedly “obvious” seems far from “self-explanatory”: to attain his goal, Semrau finds it necessary to reference as many as eighty-odd authors, from Henry Fielding to Jacques Derrida, from Abraham Maslow to George Lakoff and from Avicenna to Camus. Only then is he at peace with the conclusion that

Bartleby is no guardian of fragmented historiologic residue, no custodian of troubled memory, antiquarian of failure, connoisseur of betrayal, troubadour of drama, archivist of grievance, steward of opprobrium and contrition, or alchemist of frustrated longings. Instead, in his one true commitment/call(ing), with his sheer existence as in-sistence, subsuming the-past-and-the-future in-the-present, as both the manner and the matter, both the ‘who’ and the ‘what,’ as a perpetual sentry – he may be finally contemplated as a Heideggerian shepherd of Being. (116)

A shepherd, not the lord of being, Bartleby of “Melville’s story may be born of estrangement,” yet – as Janusz Semrau succeeds to demonstrate – it is not unthinkable that
“nevertheless at the end of the day – ‘arm in arm with Bartleby’ – we are given a possible answer to the ever pertinent query…: ‘What has this got to do with me?’” – and that, on more than one level, by far exceeding the scope of the “administrative-judisprudential” dilemma towering in the title of the essay.

This last statement is magnificently testified to by a magnificent text(ile) of reflections – or perhaps “philosophical/philological investigations,” – carefully woven by Tadeusz Sławek. His text, “Bartleby, almost Bartleby,” is perhaps the most challenging essay to address in a manner simultaneously descriptive and critical. Organized in numbered paragraphs, the text resembles a series of “intellectual snapshots” included in a thematically cohesive album. Arranged to be regarded in a linear fashion, yet demandingly multifaceted in terms of the sheer range of addressed problems, ideas and plethora of references, it is manifests itself as a tightly (inter)twined meta-digression. Sławek chooses a complex, yet most lucid, somewhat Nietzschean formula of addressing Bartleby: a discourse legitimizing an inconclusive ending to the hermeneutic process, informing the final shape of the text of interpretation (and doing justice to the story by virtue of its coming to terms with the impossibility of conclusion), and a conclusion drawing upon the open-endedness of the presented reflection. Compelling one to recommence the reading as soon as one has finished, the text haunts the reader with its approximative “almost,” yet disarms the language of academic violence by liberating it from sharp statements, which – like sharp tools – may well be the original cause of the ultimate rigor: rigor mortis.

Its wide scope notwithstanding, Sławek’s text, preeminently, is a “text of friendship.” An act of “philosophical life,” as much as a close reading of the Melvillean narrative, it reaches out to its contexts, both those directly addressed and those potentially available. As the scholar explains it:

A contrast between the Lawyer and his business associates and friends and the utter friendlessness and loneliness of Bartleby projects itself over the question of philosophy, traditionally conceived as the ‘friendship of wisdom,’ philo-sophia, that now reveals an uneasy paradox: if modern world understood friendship merely in terms of a declaration of assistance, then friendship does not seem to have much to do with wisdom. If ‘philosophy’ is to save its connection with the latter, it must turn away from the idle talk of and about ‘friends’ and abandon itself to loneliness and recognition of one’s alienation…. Bartleby is a study in de-formation of friendship and a difficult attempt at its re-constitution. (137 – 138)

It is in such a context that Tadeusz Sławek proposes to read Bartleby’s “unbiographable” existence in terms of the “ontological insecurity” it evokes and the character’s “re-
sistance,” which he perceives as an act of rejection of a world that insists on “naming everything away,” rather than that of the denial of “personal charity,” of friendship “distorted” and selfishly reduced to a strategy of “frictionless” functioning (145).

Sławek’s thought-provoking analysis of Bartleby transgresses the limits of its own scope, becoming a warm reflection upon the condition of human-kind. Friendship, which involves the readiness of the “I” to be-little in the space of the other, to accept the anxiety without insisting to define the other out, without reinforcing the pedestal of one’s own Weltanschauung at the cost of silencing the Other, is prerequisite to survival and the condition of hope. Ultimately, in Sławek’s text, Melville’s New York narrative, the sepia snapshot of the past, coincides with the post 9/11 New York of today. “There is,” Elizabeth Harwick observes, “something of Manhattan in Bartleby, and especially in his resistance to amelioration. His being stirs the water of pity, and we can imagine that the little boats that row about him throwing out ropes of personal charity or bureaucratic provision for his ‘case’ may grow weary and move back to the shore in a mood of frustration, and finally, forgetfulness”(150). And Gus Franza’s letter to the Editor of the New York Times, with which Tadeusz Sławek prefaces his reflections, drives his point home: “‘I would prefer not to’ is a good existential philosophy. President Bush should have employed it in Iraq.”

Bartleby’s enigma, “embarrassingly difficult” to the Lawyer and powerfully inscribed into the world looking for “effectuality and meaning,” connects Sławek’s essay to the perspective adopted by Marek Wilczyński in his “Melville after Lacan: ‘Bartleby’ and the reader’s desire.” Taking the idea of the “ontological insecurity” to a meta-level, Wilczyński nevertheless attempts to save the story from becoming a complete “loss to criticism.” In the Lacanian fashion, the author reads psychosis as the condition experienced by an outsider to the symbolic order, and points to the parallelisms between the Lawyer’s desire to “understand” his employee and critical acts of the story’s countless exegetes.

Built upon the concepts of the Name-of-the-Father/Fatherlessness, the symbolic order/psychosis, the (m)Other’s Desire/existential lack, and concentrating on the psychoanalytic interpretation of metaphoric functions of the concept of the “dead letter” in the appendix to the story and on the rhetoric of Bartleby’s reactions to the Lawyer’s queries throughout it, Wilczyński’s analysis successfully avoids the pitfalls of the “medicinalization.” Rather than diagnosing Bartleby, the scholar focuses his reflection upon what the assertion of the eponymous character’s psychosis “mean in the tale” and “for the tale,” emphasizing that “a psychiatric diagnosis, even though it appears clinically correct, refers only to the fictitious individual, and not to Melville’s tale in its tantalizing complexity. Recognizing the scrivener as a psychotic, it promises to ease the reader’s anxiety...
with a familiar label, which, however, has little to do with literature” (163). The above notwithstanding, the author employs the Lacanian model of psychic growth to disclose a “gap between the Symbolic and the Imaginary,” and hence to offer a consistent reading of the copyist’s “notorious responses” within both the intra- and the extratextual perspective.

Bartleby’s acts of refusal, puncturing the comprehensible order which the Lawyer (apparently) shares with the story’s reader, gain on an interesting dimension when Wilczyński invites two other “Gestalts” into his analysis: Gilles Deleuze’s and Jacques Derrida’s. The former allows Wilczyński to couple the idea of the symbolic order with the concept of social order, in which Bartleby, a “pure outsider,” epitomizes the impossibility of the attribution of any social position, as well as to comment upon the characteristics of the French philosopher’s “Gestalt,” in which the juxtaposition of the “filial” relations within the story are paralleled by the Desire of the Other manifest in his perception of the juxtaposition of Europe and America, “translated” into/onto the text of his interpretation. The latter, in turn, invokes a hermeneutic prejudgment derived from the observation of the parallelism between Bartleby and Job, as characters “who dreamed of not being born” and between Bartleby and Abraham, whose preference not to kill Isaac is comparable to Bartleby’s. The scrivener’s “I would prefer not to,” as Derrida observes, “is also a sacrificial passion that will lead him to death, a death given by the law, by a society that doesn’t even know why it acts the way it does” (171), which gains on centrality in the context of the debate upon democracy as an order denying one the right “not to answer,” thus feeding back to the discourse proposed by Deleuze and, ultimately, providing a frame to Wilczyński’s brilliant analysis:

Clearly, Bartleby has become a political text case, a proof that democracy is founded on force that can put an individual to death when he does not agree to have his subjectivity violated. Apparently, this is another all-too-familiar reading in terms of martyrdom, but the last two sentences [Derrida’s analysis] come to the rescue. Having noticed that [while declaring ‘I would prefer not to’] the scrivener does not explicitly say either ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ Derrida… claims in a somewhat helpless, if also in a vaguely promising, way: ‘There is a great deal to be said about the immense text of Melville’s.’(172)

Translating the Lacanian concept of psychosis, through “Bartleby,” onto a much broader plane of discursive paradigms and their “ordering” functionality, Wilczyński’s text opens up a vista, in which Melville’s “perforated story” may be seen as both a “pretext” for a debate on the psychosocial conditioning of the ethics of exclusion and as
a metanarrative “post-text” to hermeneutics. As such, it is also a “pallid,” yet legible inscription upon the parchment of the Western culture, a palimpsest, of which a fraction was described by in the essay opening the collection by Andrzej Kopcewicz: the preeminent scribe, to whom of all of the letters painstakingly typed up by the participating contributors pay homage and whose continued presence, as evidenced by the present review, cannot be doubted. The intellectual superiority of both hereby described collections testifies not only to the quality of the American Studies in Poland, but also to the importance of the academic and pedagogical contribution Andrzej Kopcewicz indisputably made to the development of the discipline. His monument, evidently, is not of the dead matter of motionless stone or black letters on white pages: the matter of which it is constructed is gray, and very much alive. 

So fare thee well, poor devil of a Sub-Sub, whose commentator I am. Thou belongeth to that hopeless, sallow tribe which no wine of this world will ever warm; and for whom even Pale Sherry would be too rosy-strong; but with whom one sometimes loves to sit, and feel poor-devilish, too; and grow convivial upon tears; and say to them bluntly, with full eyes and empty glasses, and in not altogether unpleasant sadness—Give it up, Sub-Subs! For by how much the more pains ye take to please the world, by so much the more shall ye for ever go thankless! Would that I could clear out Hampton Court and the Tuileries for ye! But gulp down your tears and hie aloft to the royal-mast with your hearts; for your friends who have gone before are clearing out the seven-storied heavens, and making refugees of long-pampered Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, against your coming. Here ye strike but splintered hearts together—there, ye shall strike unsplinterable glasses! [Melville]

Pawel Jędrzejko


What the two volumes of W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej edited by Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich achieve is striking a happy balance between considering canon an immutable pedagogical device for presenting an established modernist ideal of humanist education by familiarizing students and the reading public with isolated works recog-
The grounds on which canon revision is to be achieved, as much as the arguments for leaving it intact, are more often than not pragmatic and instrumental: one for taking art to be politically effective in promoting the interests of marginalized social groups, the other for assuming that canons are tools for organizing conceptions of the past, and both for valuing them only to the extent that they are useful pedagogical devices.

To cripple the ability of art to conceive of things as other than they happen to be is to naturalize reality as given, which is the most insidious form of ideology

E. Dean Kolbas

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned... they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other.

Henry James

nized as masterpieces and a more flexible vision where canon is not a static list but can be understood, in the words of E. Dean Kolbas, as a “changing constellation” (Critical Theory and the Literary Canon 142) of texts of culture, a tour of a Jame-sian house of fiction, or – as Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich suggests herself in the preface to the second volume – an excursion that will take the readers to a succession of various houses of fiction, situated at different crossroads and forking paths in the space-time of the history of American Literature.

If the first volume whose subtitle, Od Nathaniela Hawthorne’a do Joyce Carol Oates, invokes what might be referred to as certain established cultural constants, i.e. names that have kept appearing in the syllabuses of university American Literature courses in Poland for a long time now, the second volume, titled W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej: Z placu Waszyngtona do Domu z liści seems to view canonization more as an ongoing cultural process of transformation. Along with changing cultural and political circumstances new works emerge as worthy of canonization, while the works hitherto regarded as masterpieces (as the editor emphasizes in the preface to the first volume, this certainly pertains to the works established as canonical by F. O. Matthiessen in American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman) are continually rewritten and reproduced thus becoming so assimilated in a culture that they might even appear familiar and commonplace.

Therefore, as Kolbas points out – and what some essays collected in the volumes edited by Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich clearly demonstrate – “canonicity as a measure of aesthetic quality can also be the judgment of a work’s radically critical potential, one which is as subversive of the status quo as it is of its own institutional accommodation” (139-140). The essays included in W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej, in particular
those by Mikołaj Wiśniewski, Piotr Skurowski, Tadeusz Rachwał, Tadeusz Pióro, Ewa Łuczak, Anna Krawczyk-Łaskarzewska, and Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, show that this is especially true of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” and The Scarlet Letter, Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby, Vladimir Nabokov’s Pale Fire, Henry David Thoreau’s Walden, Ernest Hemingway’s Farewell to Arms and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, and Toni Morrison’s Beloved.

Devoted to the discussion of selected texts of American literature published since 1844 (the publication date of “Rappaccini’s Daughter” by Hawthorne) and the vicissitudes of their canonicity, not only are the two volumes of W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej complementary, but can also be jointly regarded – and this is what Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich stresses in the preface to the second volume – as a voice in the Polish debate concerning canons (ignited by the controversy over Polish literature reading list for schools) by indirectly offering a new perspective on the process of Polish literary canon formation. The thirteen essays included in the first volume and the fourteen essays in the second volume, written by scholars who, immersed in different generational ideas of what texts American literary canon should comprise, offer a variety of textual readings, theoretical approaches and angles on discussing canonicity.

Mikołaj Wiśniewski’s excellent essay on The Scarlet Letter, which reframes the reading of the Gothic tale of Puritan New England in terms of an urge for political compromise in the antebellum United States, opens the first volume, W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej: Od Nathaniela Hawthorne’a do Joyce Carol Oates. On the other hand, Piotr Skurowski’s essay locates the unflagging fascination with which generations of readers approach Henry David Thoreau’s Walden in its mythopoetically firm, clear-cut, and autonomous answer to the question “how to live and what for?”. Dorota Kwiatkowska-Bagniuk’s reflection on Henry James’s founding of what might be considered a fledgling feminist perspective on the portrayal of women’s victimization by their own sex in The Portrait of a Lady is followed by Mikołaj Wiśniewski’s incisive reading of Mark Twain’s ambivalence about race based paradoxically, against the thrust of previous canonization, on the discussion of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Tadeusz Rachwał’s elegantly written essay employs the rhetorical figure of litotes to stake out the space of unmanliness in Hemingway’s Farewell to Arms. This constitutes the author’s point of departure for the discussion of the writer’s indirect construction of androgyny as a figure of the renouncement of war and situating the space of love outside combat. Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich brings back into the attention of younger academics John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath, the novel ever-popular with the readers on account of its blending of naturalism and archetypal efficacy but ignored by scholars.
Tadeusz Pióro, in turn, demonstrates that it is blues as a musical form that functions as the vehicle for expressing Ellison’s ethical concerns and anxieties about American democracy in *Invisible Man*.

Paulina Stec discusses different aspects of experiencing America in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. It is surprising, however, that even as the author mentions Edgar Allan Poe, she links the character of Annabel (Leigh), Humbert’s first sweetheart, as well as his paradoxical and venomous attempts to regain the bliss of his lost love, with Francis Scott Fitzgerald’s characters’ quest in search for lost origins rather than with Poe’s obsession with the death of a beautiful young woman and his poem “Annabel Lee.”

In the essay devoted to Philip Roth Marek Paryż succinctly presents the writer’s artistic biography and discusses three novels representative of different stages of his career. These are: *Portnoy’s Complaint*, *The Ghost Writer*, and *The Human Stain*. The discussion of the latter novel that touches on multiple unarticulated traumas of contemporary American history is followed by Ewa Łuczak’s essay on historical traumas sustained by women of color. By employing the image of creating home on and out of the ruins of a previous oppressive order Ewa Łuczak refers in her text on Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* to the struggle of culturally stigmatized women (the African American – by the legacy of slavery; the American Latina – by omnipotent patriarchal structure of the family) to achieve autonomy as subjects fully aware of their traumatic history and their place in it. In the article devoted to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* Jerzy Kamionowski, in turn, compellingly interrogates complex relationships between the incommunicability of primal experience, deep memory, and the process of democratization of history making discussed by Zygmunt Bauman.

Andrzej Antoszek reflection on Don DeLillo’s novel *Underworld* leads the scholar to consider it the likeliest candidate for the designation of the Great American Novel because with its non-linear narrative, excess, and celebration of both systems and waste it most perfectly represents the spirit of contemporary American life. What follows is the perspicacious analysis by Marek Paryż of the new prose (published after 2000) by Joyce Carol Oates, a prolific and versatile American writer, who employs realistic convention with an admixture of such genres as romance and Gothic in order to capture the social and cultural dynamics of contemporary America. The discussion of *Middle Age: A Romance*, *The Tattooed Girl*, and *The Falls* closes the volume.

Dorota Kawiatkowska-Bagniuk’s essay on the struggle for awareness and autonomy on the part of the female protagonist of *Washington Square* by Henry James, Catherine Sloper, opening the second volume, *W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej: Z placu Waszyngtona do Domu z liści*, complements Kawiatkowska-Bagniuk’s reflection on Henry James’s construction of women’s identity, included in volume one. In the essay on the
mechanism operative in the tradition of American Gothic, Anna Krawczyk-Łaska-
rzewska investigates the ways in which the tension between knowledge and horror inhe-
rent in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “Rappaccini’s Daughter” informs the Gothic
texts of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ambrose Bierce and H. P. Lovecraft and has bearing
on the formal developments in the field of Gothic horror. Aptly, Krawczyk-
Łaskarzewska’s remarks on Lovecraft’s horror of dissolution in the cosmos are followed
by the discussion of a female’s willing dissolution in universe as a way of transcending
social limitations of Victorian culture. In present ing Kate Chopin’s novel The Awakening
as the inversion of the fairy tale “The Sleeping Beauty” on the one hand and in noting,
on the other hand, the pre-Christian symbolism that evokes the pagan glorification of
female as goddess in Chopin’s novel, Ewa Konopka clarifies why the novel entered the
canon only as late as the second half of the twentieth century.

Piotr Skurowski, in turn, draws the reader’s attention to the once canonical writer,
Sinclair Lewis, and his bestseller, Babbitt, a novel featuring Zennith city, a sublimely
exaggerated image of the modern civilization, and the Babbitts as an embodiment of the
middle class success, by now sunk into oblivion. Mi kołaj Wiśniewski continues the
discussion of the 1920s culture proposing in his excellent and incisive essay a reading of
Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby as the portrayal of the times when a new mass sub-
jectivity is born and identity becomes a product in the capitalist market. In the light of
such careful and cogent reading of the text of the novel it almost seems improbable that
the author stumbles against a detail whose significance is, paradoxically, enhanced by
his own interpretation. Benjamin Franklin-like time-tables and self-improvement resolu-
tions are not inscribed by a young James Gatz in a notepad, but, very tellingly, on the
last fly-leaf of Hopalong Cassidy, a Wild West adventure book. The essay that debunks
the myth of Gatsby’s passionate love is followed by Beata Zawadka’s reflection on the
struggle of Miranda, the protagonist of several short stories by Katherine Anne Porter to
overcome the illusion of female identity, romantic in form and oppressive in content,
imposed by the patriarchal society of the American South on young women.

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich discusses postmodern intertextual response by Anto-
nio Tabucchi in Tristano Dies to the canonical status of Ernest Hemingway as a writer
and to his thinly disguised autobiographical story self-consciously thematizing the ruin
and death of a canonical author, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro.” The canonicity of the text
that self-consciously and autopoetically cannibalizes its own rhizomic cannibalization of
numerous other canonical texts and canons of culture has been taken up by Mikołaj
Wisniewski in his short but fascinating treatise on Vladimir Nabokov’s Pale Fire. Appo-
sitely, the following essay by Jerzy Kamionowski also touches, as it were, on fire. Ka-
mionowski discusses Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children’s Crusade:
A Duty-Dance with Death as a never-fulfilled postmodern apocalypse and juxtaposes it with both canonical and apocryphal apocalyptic texts, such as the biblical Book of Daniel, apocryphal Book of Enoch, and the Revelation of St John.

Marek Oziewicz’s reflection on Ursula Le Guin’s cycle Earthsea and the role of her writings in admitting fantasy in the canon is simultaneously a story of how the transformations in the writing of the canonized writer, and changing political and cultural emphasis in her works contributed to the transformation in understanding of the concept of the canon. In DeLillo’s Libra, discussed by Mikołaj Wiśniewski, on the contrary, the sense of agency is an illusion. The scholar suggests that the yarn of plot spins itself, while the identity of DeLillo’s Lee Harvey Oswald character, who might or might not be a part of a global plot to assassinate John F. Kennedy, is de-centered and shattered – a rhizomic plimpsest of entangled narratives. The story of investigation of the apparent plot becomes a canonically postmodern autotelic investigation of the story plots.

The following two essays by Marek Paryż present and interpret novels written after the year 2000 by such canonical writers as Philip Roth and John Updike, while Andrzej Antoszek’s critical text on Mark Danielewski’s The House of Leaves closes the volume. Antoszek’s essay that imitates the writer’s play with typography, visuality and materiality of the printed text is situated on the cusp of literary criticism and the so called liberature, thus gesturing towards possible new directions of extending the canon. The young scholar invites the vision of the canon open to hybridity that unites the literary with the critical and, simultaneously, the verbal and the visual.

Written in Polish, W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej both presents to the Polish reader a valuable survey of outstanding works of American literature, all but The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros and Danielewski’s House of Leaves translated to Polish, and provides literary, historical, social, and political contexts for the discussed texts. The essays collected in the two volumes can also serve as additional reading for students of American literature and culture, ambitious reading for secondary school students planning to study American literature and culture as well as being used by teachers of American culture as background material.

Although it is perhaps regrettable that the investigation of the concept of canonicity in American literature and culture has not reached as far back as to consider the writings of Puritans, it must be emphasized that owing to the range of problems discussed, wealth of bibliographical and biographical information, interesting readings of texts and new interpretative perspectives W kanonie prozy amerykańskiej is indisputably a very useful and valuable publication.

Zofia Kolbuszewska

The anthology *Czarno na białym. Afroamerykanie, którzy poruszyli Amerykę*, edited by Ewa Łuczak and Andrzej Antoszek, familiarizes the Polish reader with profiles of selected African American artists and politicians, whose lives, activities, and cultural productions have profoundly influenced contemporary American culture. The volume opens with a preface where the editors introduce and justify their selection of figures. They also elaborate on the position of African American culture within the wider historical context and discuss its common characteristics: the political and socially engaged character, the fact that it privileges the community over the individual, and that it is characterized by the blurred boundary between high and low culture. For the Polish reader, such an introduction enables a better understanding of the essays which follow.

*Czarno na białym* is divided into five sections devoted respectively to literature, politics, music, art, and popular culture. The first section begins with Małgorzata Chrzan’s profile of Ed Bullins, an artist whose output is almost unknown in Poland. Chrzan’s essay introduces quite a detailed biography of Bullins, with the focus on his relations with the Black Panthers and the Black Arts Movement. On the one hand, Bullins’s texts were faithful to the basic tenets of the 1960s movement; they focused on the black experience and served as consciousness-raising sessions produced by black artists for the black audience. On the other hand, Chrzan claims that his plays transcended the black nationalist paradigm since Bullins avoided didacticism and ready answers. The Black Arts Movement recurs also in the following essay, in which Jerzy Kamionowski presents the most influential of radical black artists from the 1960s, Le Roi Jones/Amiri Baraka. The essay opens with the recent controversy surrounding *Somebody Blew Up America*, Baraka’s poem about the 9/11 events, due to its allegedly anti-Semitic content. Kamionowski’s close analysis of the poem convincingly refutes the discriminatory charges against it as well as illuminates its experimental poetics rooted in the black vernacular. What follows is a detailed overview of Baraka’s artistic output, from his beginnings in the Beat Generation, through his central role in the Black Arts Movement, Marxist fascinations, and back to the controversial poem. This meticulous outline of Baraka’s artistic career is presented from a wide variety of critical perspectives on his art, ranging from the Brechtian theater tradition and Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty to black feminist accounts of Baraka’s masculinist art. Such a multifaceted reading of Baraka supports Kamionowski’s thesis that as an artist, he is difficult to classify, and that it is an oversimpli-
ification to identify him solely with the Black Arts Movement tradition. Since Kamionowski provides a more detailed insight into black culture of the 1960s than Chrzan and since Baraka’s art influenced that of Bullins, the section on literature would be easier to follow if it began with this essay.

The Nobel-prize winning novelist, Toni Morrison, analyzed in Ewa Łuczak’s essay, is a figure familiar to the well-read Polish reader. Łuczak focuses on the literary output of Morrison rather than on her biography and introduces central aspects of her fiction, such as its interest in the past, memory, and history; formal experimentation; dialogue with American mythology; celebration of female communities; and references to African American music. Łuczak warns against labeling Morrison’s writing with restrictive names such as modernism, postmodernism, or magic realism, pointing out that it is more effective to focus on the way her narrative techniques are rooted in different traditions.

Morrison’s self-acknowledged literary inspiration, James Baldwin, is the focus of the next essay. Magdalena J. Zaborowska familiarizes the Polish reader with Baldwin’s biography and interpolates it with summaries of his literary output. Zaborowska claims that due to the representation of the complex relationships between racial, gender, sexual, and religious sections of identity, his works are fundamental for both African American studies and queer studies.

The political section begins with Zbigniew Mazur’s essay on Martin Luther King. Although he is probably one the most recognizable of the selected persons, Mazur’s historical introduction of the Civil Rights Movement usefully deepens the understanding of King’s position in African American culture. The essay also analyzes the poetics of King’s speeches and his debt to the tradition of black ministers. Finally, Mazur exposes the ways in which King’s public image was created to fit American mythology of individualism and progress, which erased his left-wing political affiliations or the controversial issue of academic and oratorical plagiarism. Aneta Dybska introduces Dr. King’s political foil and the icon of the Black Power movement, Malcolm X. The essay provides the historical context of Jim Crow segregation and the emergence of the second ghetto, which makes it instrumental to the understanding of black power politics. Dybska analyzes the separatist media image of Malcolm X as a conscious strategy of attracting nation-wide attention, which, however, proved to be a hindrance when Malcolm X’s political views evolved. This is one of the reasons why his later political message is absent from American collective imagination. Since Malcolm X is traditionally regarded as a representative of separatist and hence Anti-American cultural politics, it is interesting that at the end Dybska reads Malcolm X through the prism of traditional American narratives and myths such as the discourse of civil rights and independence, the conversion narrative, or Horatio Alger’s success story.
Just as other European countries, Poland keenly kept trace of the last American presidential election. Therefore many Polish readers will be happy to learn more about the life of Barack Obama, the first African American president in the history of the US. Anna Bendrat provides insights into Obama’s fascinating and extraordinary life and political career. She reads his success through the prism of different theories of presidential power and concepts such as personal persuasion and emotional intelligence. Bendrat also claims that Obama’s public image is so convincing because it fits the myth of the American Adam, which focuses on the future, progress, and change.

The section devoted to music presents two figures. The first one, Muddy Waters, is hardly recognizable to the Polish reader, which issue is explored in Grzegorz Welizarowicz’s essay. Welizarowicz introduces both the life and the musical output of the bluesman who was an inspiration to bands such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Led Zeppelin. Welizarowicz analyzes Waters’s evolving musical aesthetic of the urban blues and its fusion of the Southern tradition with the contemporary urban experience. The essay also discusses the difficult predicament of the black musician, who faces the appropriation of black music by white artists and the economic exploitation by American music industry. Małgorzata Ziółek-Sowińska introduces the figure of John Coltrane, who, unlike Waters, is one of the most popular musicians among Polish jazz aficionados. She traces Coltrane’s hybrid search for the metaphysical, in which he draws from such different traditions as Christianity, Buddhism, Kabbalah, and African folklore. She links his new jazz aesthetic with the politics of the Black Power Movement. However, as Ziółek-Sowińska argues, in contrast to other contemporaneous jazz productions, Coltrane’s music avoids masculinism both on the level of its form as well as when it comes to the artists he performed with.

The art section also consists of two essays. The first one is an overview of the African American artistic scene inspired mostly by the Black Alphabet exhibition which was held at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in 2006. This extraordinary event introduced the Polish audience to the art of the most significant contemporary African American artists such as Kara Walker and her famous black cut-paper silhouettes exploring the pathologies of American racial myths; Michael Paul Britto, who engages in dialogue with American popular culture; or Kehinde Wiley, an artist who infuses the traditional representations of saints with hip-hop aesthetic. Antoszek’s essay is illustrated with high-quality photographs from the Warsaw exhibition. The second essay in this section is devoted to Bill T. Jones and his experimental dance projects. Jacek Łumiński discusses the ways in which Jones explores the issue of marginalized identities in his performances. His work challenges and rewrites the stereotypes projected onto minorities through intertextual references to high art, political discourse, and popular culture.
Łumiński specifically focuses on the black male body and the politics of masculinity in Jones’s art. His essay is an interesting complement to the texts on the black theater tradition introduced in two essays in the first section.

The popular culture section opens with Antosik’s overview of the two areas of African American culture which the Polish audience is most familiar with – hip-hop music and basketball. He introduces both cultural realms and focuses on one representative of each field – Tupac Shakur and Michael Jordan respectively. The focus on hip-hop culture is continued in Mateusz Durczak’s article on the celebrity musician Shawn Carter aka Jay-Z. Durczak’s claims about the inseparable link between hip-hop and African American musical traditions of jazz, soul, and funk refer the reader back to the earlier-mentioned essays on black music. On the example of Jay-Z, Durczak analyzes the creation of the self-image in hip-hop culture. He examines the strange yet typical of hip-hop combination of gangsta ghetto reality and luxurious life-style, which is convincing to the audience thanks to the self-identification the artist’s persona with the ghetto life and his confession about his ghetto upbringing.

The last essay in the volume is devoted to the director whose name is recognizable to an average Polish movie-goer, however, whose most important independent films are much less familiar. Krystyna Mazur begins her examination of Spike Lee’s film output with a reference to the American tradition of minstrelsy and its influence on the stereotypization of black representation in American cinema. This serves as a perfect introduction to Lee’s position as a black director in American movie industry and, more specifically, to his recent movie *Bamboozled*, which is a meta-commentary on the black representation politics and the appropriation and exploitation of the black tradition by mainstream culture. Mazur locates Lee’s output in the tradition of the New Black Aesthetic, which is at once racially conscious but culturally more hybrid that the tradition of the Black Arts Movement. She ends with a reference to Lee’s latest mainstream productions and juxtaposes them with the films that were most likely possible only due to the revenues the former produced – Lee’s recent documentaries on tragic events in African American history.

*Czarno na białym* is definitely a valuable and significant contribution to the Polish literary market. The fact that the editors decided to introduce very familiar figures along with less famous artists gives the Polish reader a wider perspective on African American culture. Analogously, the juxtaposition of black artists and politicians is a choice that reflects the close relation between black political tradition and black writing as well as the politically and socially engaged character of African American art. Moreover, many of the authors provide social and historical contexts which go beyond personal biographies. This strategy facilitates a deeper understanding and a fuller appreciation of black
cultural productions. The variety of artistic forms introduced in the volume, ranging from music, theater, dance, fine arts, film, and literature, is still another feature which gives an insightful and multifaceted representation of African American culture. The plurality of art forms, however, is also the reason why the order and division into sections is not always transparent.

The only reservation to be made regarding the selection of the figures is the lack of women artists and activists with the sole exception of the essay devoted to the Nobel-prize winner Toni Morrison. This may seem at first to be a fastidious objection, however, this absence is particularly visible in the context of American identity politics, the canon debates, and the more recent focus on the issue of intersectional identity in American studies. In addition, it gains further significance in the light of black feminist rewritings of African American history, which traditionally privileged male activists and artists. Since the 1970s, studies such as Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), Hazel V. Carby’s *Reconstructing Womanhood. The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), or the more recent Angela Y. Davis’s *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (1999) have evidenced the significance of black women’s cultural contributions. This major trend in the discourse of African American studies is also reflected in Łuczak’s essay. It must be admitted, however, that despite the underrepresentation of women artists, many authors such as Kamionowski, Ziółek-Sowińska, Łumiński, and Mazur, provide a gender perspective and discuss the predicament of masculinism in black aesthetics and sexism in black community.

The anthological conception of the volume reinforces its multifaceted character and provides the reader with a broad variety of perspectives coming from the fields of political, cultural, and music studies as well as history and sociology, which makes the volume such a valuable and interesting contribution. However, this plurality of perspectives introduces some confusion regarding terminology and translation. The editors decided not to impose the translations of “African American” and “Negro.” Thus, despite the fact that in the title and in the preface the term “Afroamerykanie” (African Americans) is used, in some essays scholars decided either to use only the terms “Murzyn” and “murzynskie” (closer to the English term “Negro”) or to use both terms interchangeably, which may generate some confusion in the Polish reader. What can further add to the disorientation is the fact that Chrzan explicitly claims in her essay that the term “Murzyn” is offensive, whereas Dybska and Mazur briefly discuss the politics of self-naming and the shift from the term “Negro” to “African American” as a significant issue in postwar black cultural politics (22, 157, 307). These incongruities interestingly...
reflect the current disagreement in the Polish academia with regard to which names are neutral and which are offensive as well as the more general debate concerning the relationship between language and social reality.

All in all, *Czarno na białym* provides the Polish audience with a valuable insight into African American culture. Most of the essays go beyond the form of historical accounts and contain brilliant analytical perspectives and references to a plethora of theories central to African American studies. The fact that the volume combines high culture with popular productions and politics is significant not only because it reflects the thesis about the blurred boundary between the high and low in African American culture, but it also targets a wider audience than the average academic publication.

Anna Pochmara


Over 50 years have passed since C. P. Snow’s diagnosis of “The Two Cultures,” first published in *New Statesman* in October 1956 and later, more prominently, delivered as a Rede lecture at Cambridge University in 1959, in which the English novelist and physicist addressed a rift running through Western systems of learning. For Snow, hard sciences and the humanities were two bodies of knowledge separated by an unbridgeable – or at least it seemed so at the time – “gulf of mutual incomprehension.” This bifurcated vision of academic standards, discourses, methods and values informed the mutual relationship of both sides for decades, resulting not only in academic wars of discourses and competition in the political and economic contexts but also in such fascinating works as Neil Postman’s *Technopoly* (1992), which expanded upon and creatively developed the antithesis of the value systems represented by sciences and the arts.

In the last two or three decades, however, this perception of divorced human knowledge has infrequently fallen short of narrating the increasingly complex relationship between sciences, both hard and soft, technology and the humanities. This revised correlation of previously disparate fields can be rooted in the alleged transformation of Western societies into technologically-advanced, even posthuman, entities but can also stem from the progressing interdisciplinarity of numerous fields and discourses. Consequently, the contemporary landscape of knowledge production is not one of deep fault lines and insular fields, but instead that of multiple intersecting vectors. Next to game studies or animal studies, science studies, whose name still remains fluid and un-engraved,
focuses on and fosters connections in which rigorous scientific enquiry is enmeshed with free-ranging and philosophical extrapolation. Whether it is dubbed technoculture, philosophy of science or science studies, this new approach utilizes tools and perspectives of both sciences and the arts, whose variety is best exemplified in the works of such diverse thinkers and scholars as Arthur Koestler, Thomas Kuhn, Friedrich Kittler, Bruno Latour, Michel Serres and Katherine Hayles.

Scientific Cultures – Technological Challenges. A Transatlantic Perspective is a recent contribution to this fascinating discourse. Even though its inception owes to the 2007 annual conference of the Bavarian American Academy, the volume is much more than conference proceedings and features commissioned articles next to the extended versions of the symposium presentations. It is also this mixed origin that, to my mind, accounts for the only criticism one can hold against this otherwise very competently edited collection – the lack of clear thematic focus. The contributions are spread really far and wide between such polarities as the use of the latest web technologies for academic publishing, genetic genealogy testing, and the structures of R&D funding. On the one hand, such diffusion demonstrates the variety and breadth of preoccupations at the intersections of sciences and the humanities, but on the other it may be somewhat disorienting for someone who only recently entered the field. Consequently, it is not entirely clear who the intended readers are. Scientific Cultures – Technological Challenges. A Transatlantic Perspective does not aspire to being a reader or a comprehensive introduction – especially since the volume features only 11 contributions. On the other hand, those already working in individual disciplines represented here will find most articles fairly general and the scattering of topics adds to the a certain sense of randomness. Given the second part of the title, the collection could also benefit from at least one articles attempting to compare the approaches or preoccupations on both sides of the Atlantic – as it stands now “transatlantic” merely indicates nationalities of the contributors. All in all, however, where the volume lacks in coherence and the absence of the central concept, it entirely makes up in the quality of individual essays.

This is evidenced right at the beginning of the collection. Introductions to multi-author volumes often tend to be dry run-downs through the table of contents with hardly any contextualizing or situating of the contributions. Although relatively brief, Klaus Benesch’ “Diverging Cultures, Competing Truths?” brilliantly sketches out the often conflicted relations between science, technology and the humanities by discussing two academic hoaxes – Luigi Serafini’s Codex Seraphinianus and Alan Sokal’s contribution to Social Text. Benesch’ discussion of both texts illuminates the many ways in which the discourses of one side may be adapted by but also abused by the other.
The core articles are divided into two groups: “Science, Technology and the Literary Imagination” and “Technoscience and its Publics: Theories and Practices,” comprising five and six articles respectively. The first in the former, Ursula Heise’s “Cultures of Risk and the Aesthetic Uncertainty,” is a very apt example of the blurred boundaries between science and the humanities. Focused on the emergence of risk theory and its position in the contemporary culture, it rather marginally concerns itself with literary representations and could be equally successfully included in the second part of the volume. The same concerns Hanjo Berressem’s profoundly philosophical “The habit of saying I:’ eigenvalues and resonance,” which only on the last two pages references Thomas Pynchon’s fiction. On the other hand, it shows the diversity of the territory which the volume charts by tracing “the migrations of the term ‘eigenvalue’” (45) between Hilbert’s mathematics, Schrödinger’s physics, von Foerster’s and Luhmann’s system theory, Dilthey’s literary studies, Deleuze’s philosophy and, finally, Pynchon’s writing.

Suzanne Nalbantian’s “The New Alliance of Neuroscience and the Humanities: Interdisciplinary in the Making” is a fairly straightforward introduction to one of the newest of critical theories, which attempts to rethink readings of cultural artifacts in the light of the latest developments in neuroscience as well as consciousness and cognition studies. What is interesting, in the face of “the crisis of the humanities in our age” Nalbantian sees the “prospective alliance” (90) of the humanities and sciences as the only hope for the former to maintain its relevance – as the discipline most particularly concerned with the human, neurosciences appear to be most open to cross-pollination. The departure point for Joseph Tabbi’s “All Over Writing: The Electronic Book Review (version 4.0)” is a polemic with Arjun Appadurai’s assertion that electronic media are delinked from reading and writing. One of the editors of probably the best electronic journal in the new humanities, Tabbi treats the essay as an opportunity to demonstrate how electronic interfaces, exemplified by the latest revision of ebr’s code, can be customized to foster original critical writing.

The last essay in this section, Peter Freese’s “From Ludwig Boltzmann’s Formula to Meatball Mulligan’s Party; or How to Fictionalize the Entropy Law,” represents probably the most traditional approach to the cross-linking of scientific metaphors in literary analyses – in this case the familiar ground of Pynchon’s preoccupation with entropy in short stories and The Crying of Lot 49. Although covering a fairly haphazard ground, taken together the articles in this section definitely demonstrate a breadth of the field and a variety of the modes of intersection. As such, they should be of decisive interest for all readers with the background in literary and cultural studies as well as philosophy.
The same cannot be said for the second grouping, in which only half of the essays come even vaguely close to traditional humanities: Robin Morris Collin’s “Sustainability and the Challenges of Race, Gender, and Poverty to Contemporary Scientific Cultures,” David Nye’s “From Black Box to White Box: The Changing Life Worlds of Communication Technologies” and Denise E. Pilato’s “A Signal Success: An Illuminating History of One Woman, One Invention.” The scope of the first two is ultimately summarized in their titles while the latter is essentially a biographical essay devoted to Martha Coston, a 19th-century inventor of the signal flare and international code system, paying special attention to her femininity in the era in which the archetype of a male inventor was forged.

The remaining three contributions in the technoscience section make very few gestures in the direction of the humanities although some of their concerns can, from certain perspectives, become objects of study for social scientists or historians. In “Bio Science: Genetic Genealogy testing and the Pursuit of African Ancestry” Alondra Nelson describes the ways in which the latest genetic technologies can bear upon the process of identity formation. Heike Mayer’s “Constructing Competitive Advantage: The Evolution of State R&D Investment Funds in the United States” is primarily targeted at economic historians while Rebecca Slayton’s “Disciplining Technopolitics: Physics, Computing, and the ’Star Wars’ Debate” discusses what she calls “disciplined projection” (222), in this case connected with the American military presence in space.

This brief overview of individual essays may give an impression of random multiplicity of critical voices – and, as I indicated earlier, this impression is not entirely unjustified. Given this variety, it is remarkable that even the pieces devoted to the discourses somewhat arcane to most humanities scholars remain uniformly clear and never descend into jargon. Whether this is the result of the authors’ talent or their commitment to the scientific clarity of expression is irrelevant, although I suspect both factors come into play. What is relevant is that *Scientific Cultures – Technological Challenges. A Transatlantic Perspective* may easily serve as a starting, if somewhat chaotic, insight into the cultural terrain in which two cultures permeate and resonate with each other.

Paweł Frelik


Zbigniew Lewicki, in his *Historia cywilizacji Ameryki. Era tworzenia 1607-1789*, has given us a holistic vision of the early American civilization. His book is an interdisciplinary attempt to answer the key question for each nation: how was its identity shaped in
the early days of its history? Lewicki makes us also aware that without understanding the historical past one cannot understand the present. American mentality, which Poles need to comprehend in the light of our special expectations about the United States, is strongly rooted in the specific historical conditions of the colonization of the continent and the struggle for independence. *Era tworzenia* is a major attempt to bring uniqueness of America closer to the Polish reader.

Lewicki’s book provides a detailed and multi-faceted account of the first three hundred years of the presence of white people on the North American continent. Lewicki tells us the story of how America grew up and he does so in a thoroughly modern way, fully accounting for the specificity of the early development of the American civilization. Even though his story ends with the moment when America gained independence, it gives the key to understanding the United States as it is now. History in Lewicki’s book is not reduced to its political and military aspects, but, above all, it comprises culture, customs, material conditions and daily living.

The picture of the early presence of Europeans on the North American continent, importantly, sheds light on the significance of nations other than the English – the French, the Spanish, the Dutch. Also, the Author leaves no doubt as to the barbarian attitude of the Europeans towards Native Americans, who, in turn, are shown as both victims and cruel attackers themselves. Lewicki also demonstrates very clearly that one of the main causes of the conflict was a different attitude towards the land – whether it was to be treated as common good, or as a private property. The attitude to nature of all actors on the American scene is one of the more important themes in the book, also in the context of how nature was used for farming as well as to create rural and urban space. Conflicts with Indians and the history of the slavery are presented with utmost care, showing Native American and Afro-American stories from the perspective of the colonial times, and not only through the lens of contemporary sensitivity.

The book is highly absorbing for the reader in the way it focuses on facts and myths of America. It provides an endless amount of fascinating information. For instance it explains the origin of the Halloween or the game lacrosse, it discusses the custom of bundling, it talks about fashion, garbage removal, cooking, indeed of all aspects of the settlers’ life. The history of the economic development of the colonies is shown as interrelated within the political, social and military context. The book underlines the link between the material side of the colonists’ lives and the growing ideology of individualism. The sources of American expansionism are also well documented. Another significant issue which has received attention is the demographic situation in the colonies, its impact on the formation of the social roles of women and men, the appearance of various professional groups and the system of
education. The intellectual and artistic life of the colonial period has received a full panoramic picture.

An interesting aspect of the book is the presentation of the specific socio-political solutions applied in the colonies, which largely account for the differences of the American civilization as compared to the European (another good example of how history informs the present). Also the specificity of the geographical spread of colonies is stressed, which has resulted in regional variation of American culture, often not realized by Poles who tend to see the United States in a monolithic way. The legal documents of the eighteenth century, discussed in detail, also had a strong impact on the later development of the United States, again an important issue to be shown to the Polish reader. The presentation of religious diversity, typical for American civilization from the very beginning of the country’s history, is also highly useful for the Polish reader who, as an aside, receives an explanation of various denominations (e.g. Quakers) and a fascinating picture of the impact of faith upon customs of social life. Considering the Polish audience of his book Lewicki introduces the issue of the Polish presence on the American continent, already in the early period of colonization, and later on he of course also addresses the significance of Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Tadeusz Kościuszko and Kazimierz Pulaski.

A bonus for the Polish reader lies in the linguistic explanations that accompany many of the phenomena described by Lewicki. Thus, for instance, the reader learns the meaning of phrases such as “the elect,” “visible Saint,” “Yankee tinkerer,” or “cotton gin,” acquires the knowledge about the origins of words such as “chairman,” “buck,” or “moonshine.” This linguistic dimension will endear the book to the students of English. Also extensive (even though the Author claims it had to be limited) bibliography, both Anglo and Polish, included in *Era tworzenia* can be useful for students and researchers of American culture and history.

The book represents excellent scholarship, yet is written in a light, accessible style, which makes it highly readable. Frequently Lewicki quotes fragments from original historical sources, but these are never too long to become tedious for the reader. Eloquently written historical discourse breaks every now and then with attractive short narratives. The reader has a strong sense that the book recreates for him the true climate of the times it devotes itself to.

The book is weighty – both academically and literally (hardcover, 803 pages!). Should the reader get confused about the sequence of historical events, on pages 757 to 773 there is a useful chronology of the most important facts taking place on the North American continent from 1565 until 1790. The book is organized within twelve chapters. The account of the early expeditions of Europeans to the North American continent is followed by general characterization of the English colonies and then a detailed descrip-
tion of how various groups of colonies came into being, dividing the topic into four chapters reflecting the geography of the continent, the foundation of today’s diversity of the United States. Chapter VII focuses on the details of daily life, such as the use of space in inhabited areas, trade and finances, customs of daily living, professions, food and drink, and country inns. Chapter VIII, in turn, relates the culture of the colonies in the seventeenth century, as reflected in the educational system, literature, painting, music and theatre. Chapter Nine provides a political, social and economic panorama of the colonies in the eighteenth century, while Chapters X and XI focus on the wars with Great Britain and the American Revolution. Finally, Chapter XII, entitled “New nation in the new state”, discusses key political documents, the role of religion in the newly established state as well as the society, literature, theatre and arts of the United States in the first several decades after the Declaration of Independence. Era tworzenia 1607-1789 ends in the way confirming the Author’s promise, given in the Introduction, to continue this fascinating story of America in next volumes.

Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pędich


Christopher Flynn’s *Americans in British Literature, 1770-1832* discusses British literary responses to America in the decades following the Revolution with respect to the category of time as a way to signify cultural difference. Taking his cues from anthropologist Johannes Fabian, Flynn writes that the narrative of the encounter with the Other assumes a diachronic structure which designates the Other “as someone who occupies an earlier, often primal time” (3). In the case of British writers and travelers, who described America at the turn of the nineteenth century, the deployment of such a narrative paradigm served to translate spatial separation into temporal gap, and thus accelerated the discursive process of othering Americans. Flynn distinguishes four categories of texts which use concepts of time to explain the disparity between England and America. The first category is represented by sentimental novels from the closing decades of the eighteenth century, whose authors strove to redefine the relationship between America and England in emotional terms, instead of political, but they eventually admitted that the gap between the two nations is unbridgeable. As Flynn puts it: “In these works the traumatic recognition of spatial distance appears as temporal irreconcilability” (5). The second category includes the narratives based on the utopian model; in creating utopian visions of America, British authors implicitly related to the social and political unrest in Europe in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Flynn argues that the liberal and
radical writers and thinkers in England regarded the French Revolution as an impetus for a new beginning of European history, and some of them used the American interior as the setting for the reenactment of the fantasy of the new beginning. The third category comprises literary works whose authors envisage America as “a place where history could be escaped altogether” (5). This idea had to do with the combination of the concepts of time ascribed to different epochs in the course of history. The most symptomat-ic reflection of such a way of thinking about time was the recognition of concomitant savage and civil qualities of American people. The last category is represented by travel accounts written after 1815; the authors of these narratives aimed to prove America’s cultural backwardness despite its indisputable economic growth. Their use of temporal concepts was inextricably connected with their anthropological investigations. Christopher Flynn’s argument in the book is built around these four types of narratives and the respective ways of understanding time as a factor of cultural difference.

Chapter One, focusing on the presentation of America, in particular of the American Revolution, in British sentimental fiction, deals with the literary construction of affect as a way to sustain an emotional connection between England and its former colonies in America. Flynn claims that the subject of sympathy, which thematically defines the genre of sentimental fiction, provides the emotional script for preserving the link across the Atlantic at the time of political turbulence. However, the necessity to render sympathy in discursive terms defers the very act of communicating the emotion. Flynn emphasizes the importance of the body politic metaphor in the representations of the American Revolution, supporting his point with references to the anonymous Tales of Truth (1780) and Charlotte Smith’s The Old Manor House (1794), where gendered imaginings set America in the role of a feminized victim of a violent assault. The images evoking physical violence and bodily suffering figuratively correspond to political separation whose temporal dimension acquires a very meaningful form in epistolary novels. Three epistolary novels discussed by Flynn in greater detail: Mt. Henneth by Robert Bage (1788), Euphemia by Charlotte Lennox (1790) and anonymous Louisa Wharton (1780), show how the genre creates temporal distance. All three plots include an exchange of correspondence across the Atlantic. The characters who write letters witness the growing gap between England and America and try to prevent this through emotional involvement. The point is that, within the structure of the epistolary novel, the discursive act, which is a vehicle for the expression of emotion, is always inevitably belated and describes an irreversible course of events.

Chapter Two is tellingly titled “English Reforms in American Settings” and discusses the place of America in the British utopian doctrines developed in the 1790s. In general, America in British utopian narratives features as a space which would be useful for Brit-
ish social and political reformers; this results in a very reductive presentation of the inhabitants of the land who are portrayed as dependent on England and ideas imported from there or altogether ignored. Such a depiction is part and parcel of the way the British writers re-imagined their own nation. The first text discussed by Flynn in this chapter is America: A Prophecy by William Blake (1795). In Flynn’s words, this work “serves as a model for reform in that it clarifies the nature of radical political action in the late eighteenth century” (54). Blake’s symbolic vision of the movement of energy, which represents radical ideology, evokes a spatial configuration with America as a place where the idea of liberty can be forged anew. In turn, liberty is to constitute the foundation of a new order and a new stage in history. Flynn observes that Blake’s symbolic narrative enables the writer to control the historical events which anguished him.

The next work presented in the chapter is The Emigrants (1793), a novel ascribed to Mary Wollstonecraft, but most probably a result of her collaboration with Gilbert Imlay. One of the particular subjects of the book is oppressive marriage which, in a broader sense, reflects the corruption of English institutions. The American characters turn out to be the most outspoken critics of the English way of life, but without embodying any uniquely positive American qualities. The book advocates emigration to America where social and moral regeneration of British people, especially British women, can be achieved as well as their physical strength recovered. Flynn proceeds to talk about the presence of America in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s writings. Coleridge takes to a certain extreme the split between American and Americans, discernible in The Emigrants, specifically when he writes about the land without mentioning the people. A characteristic aspect of Coleridge’s depiction of America with respect to its difference from England is his emphasis on language as a primary marker of America’s cultural inferiority. The poet’s criticism of America, not infrequently steeped in nationalistic rhetoric, came after his Pantisocratic phase when he envisaged America as “an unpopulated paradise with unlimited room for a community of the elect on Earth” (67). Flynn concludes Chapter Two with a discussion of A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America by Gilbert Imlay (1792) and Some Information Respecting America by Thomas Cooper (1794), which further enhance the picture of America as a place for the English who have been spared the necessity to brush shoulders with Americans.

Chapter Three addresses the conceptual combination of savagery and civility in the British literary representations of the American “natural man.” This condition is not reserved for American people; an Englishman can also experience it, which attests to a powerful influence of the American environment. The state of nature as a category describing the human situation helps to interrogate the very concept of identity, showing it as essentially unstable. The instability of individual identity, resulting from the exis-
tence outside the bounds of one’s culture, corresponds to the vagueness of political boundaries. It is not accidental that some of the works which revolve around the notions of savagery and civility employ the motif of captivity. It can be found, for example, in Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771), where one character, a Scotsman in America, goes through a period of savagery to be eventually recovered for civil and civilized life. In Flynn’s view, the writer’s interest in such a process suggests that “the expansion of empire has broken down spatial and racial barriers that had seemed permanent” (93). An analogous plot development appears in Charlotte Lennox’s *Euphemia*, where the character’s shift from the savage to the civil state is enhanced by the use of British historical symbols. A more complex picture of America as a place for the new experience emerges from William Wordsworth’s poem “The Excursion” (1814), which, according to Flynn, expresses the romantic longing to escape history. The protagonist of Wordsworth’s poem, named the Solitary, travels in America in search of freedom and originality, but to his utmost disappointment, he encounters the people striving to achieve the things that Europeans have compromised. Wordsworth’s feelings about America harmonize with Byron’s sentiments expressed in Cantos I and II of *Don Juan*. However, the latter poet’s dissatisfaction with America, connected with his recognition of the anti-heroic character of its people, gives way to a more positive view, with George Washington as the epitome of the natural state which Byron seeks.

Chapter Four discusses travel accounts of America by British authors, uncovering the presumed ethnographic subtexts of such narratives. In essence, Flynn is interested in the patterns of cultural critique in the genre of travel writing and the role of such critique in the stereotypization of America and Americans in English literary discourse from the 1830s onward. Three most important travel books examined in this chapter are Henry Bradshaw Fearon’s *Sketches of America* (1818), Basil Hall’s *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828* (1829), and Frances Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). Flynn points to a number of recurring observations about American language, manners, religion etc., constituting the typical ethnographic content. In this chapter, Flynn also talks about the textual strategies of creating the effect of objectivity and authenticity, which was the basis of the British authors’ narrative authority.

Christopher Flynn’s *Americans in British Literature, 1770-1832* is a major contribution to the study of the Anglo-American literary relations after the American Revolution for at least three reasons. First, the book shows the continuity of the literary representations of Americans in English books at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. There are numerous critical books on Anglo-American literary encounters in the latter century, and Flynn’s book enriches this body of criticism by identifying the earliest literary sources that helped to shape the perception of America and
Americans by the English for many decades after the Revolution. Second, *Americans in British Literature* introduces texts representing a variety of genres. This generic diversity, establishing a dialogue between works of poetry and prose or fiction and non-fiction, accounts for the impressive scope of Flynn’s presentation. Third, the book discusses canonical texts alongside unknown ones, and thus it attests to the great potential of what David S Reynolds, in *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988), has called “reconstructive criticism.”

Marek Paryż


Fay Botham’s highly original study, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law*, explores the role religion played in the legal regulation of interracial marriage in the United States from the colonial period to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Botham shows how Protestant and Catholic interpretations of the Bible concerning matrimony and race exercised considerable influence over miscegenation law, providing the first historical study of the link between Christianity and American attitudes towards intermarriage. In doing so, Botham delves into the history of religious doctrine, examining writings on marriage and racial distinctions from the Reformation to the modern era in order to establish a divergence between Catholic and Protestant views on interracial marriage’s “cultural and religious legitimacy” (6). At the root of the divide is the Roman Catholic Church’s affirmation of matrimony as a purely religious rite that bestows divine grace upon those who receive it, and the Protestant tradition of designating marriage a sacred yet secular institution best regulated by civil authorities. Furthermore, in the twentieth century the Vatican developed a theology of race (mainly in response to the Nazi regime) that stressed the unity of all people under God as sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, implying racial equality and creating a basis on which progressive Catholics could oppose segregation. Protestants, however, particularly in the American South, adhered to a racial paradigm that denied integration on the insistence that God had “dispersed” the races on different continents, as supposedly recounted in Genesis. In elucidating the two positions, Botham stresses that despite the sharp difference between the two theologies, not all Protestants were irredeemable racists, nor were all Catholics crusaders for integration. Nonetheless, she argues persuasively that the Catholic emphasis on unity “contributed to the demise of American anti-
miscegenation laws and racial separation at the marriage altar,” while the Protestant view provided a strong religious basis for antimiscegenation law in the American courts (8).

Two cases frame Botham’s book: the 1948 California Supreme Court case of Perez v. Lippold, and the 1967 US Supreme Court case of Loving v. the Commonwealth of Virginia. The first overturned California’s antimiscegenation laws with an appeal to religious freedom. In 1947, Sylvester Davis Jr. (African American) and Andrea Perez (of Mexican origin but considered Caucasian) decided to marry. Both Catholics, they approached a priest in the racially diverse St. Patrick’s parish of Los Angeles. He regretfully informed them that the state of California prohibited intermarriage, and that their application for a license would surely be denied. Discouraged but determined, the couple engaged the services of civil rights lawyer Daniel Marshall, who was not only a fellow church member but also president of the Catholic Interracial Counsel. On his advice, they applied to marry and were predictably refused by the Los Angeles County clerk. Marshall then filed a petition with the California Supreme Court and successfully argued that the couple, as Catholics, had been denied a religious sacrament. Because the Catholic Church did not ban marriage between different races, the state’s antimiscegenation statutes had violated Davis and Perez’s First Amendment right to freely practice their religion. After a year of deliberation, the court declared the prohibition of interracial marriage unconstitutional on the basis of the Fourteenth Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause, and the happy couple soon wed.

Loving v. Virginia was more hard-fought. In 1958 Mildred Jeter (half black and half Cherokee) and Richard Loving (Caucasian) briefly traveled from their home state of Virginia to marry in the District of Columbia. Several weeks later, the county Sheriff entered their home in the middle of the night and arrested them for violating Virginia laws banning interracial marriage. A Catholic judge, Leon Bazile, handed down a suspended sentence of one year on condition the couple suffer banishment from the state for the next quarter century. In 1963, when Congress started debating the civil rights bill that would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Mildred Jeter, now living in Washington D.C., wrote then-attorney general Robert Kennedy in the hope of challenging the Virginia convictions. Kennedy’s office forwarded the letter to the American Civil Liberties Union, which took up the case. Their attorneys argued that the Lovings’ constitutional rights to due process and equal protection had been violated by Virginia’s antimiscegenation laws. The very same judge that had sentenced the couple years before denied the motion and reaffirmed his original ruling, stating: “Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay, and red, and he placed them on different continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix”
The Lovings’ case eventually made it to the US Supreme Court, aided by a coalition of Catholic organizations that disputed the decision on grounds of religious freedom. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled Virginia’s prohibition of intermarriage unconstitutional, again on the civil grounds of the Fourteenth Amendment, ending antimiscegenation laws throughout the United States.

The United States is one of a relatively small number of countries to have banned intermarriage. While Nazi Germany and South Africa initiated and ended this practice during the twentieth century, in North America antimiscegenation measures were enacted as early as the mid-1600s, even in colonies that eschewed slavery as the foundation of the economic system. Botham examines why these prohibitions appeared and endured through a comparison of the legal regulation of interracial marriage in Protestant Britain’s colonies and Spanish and French-ruled Catholic regions. In British areas miscegenation statutes came about as a result of race-specific slavery and gender-based legal issues. Mainly, such laws precluded any confusion about the legal status of offspring born to unions between English and Africans. Mulatto children were generally classified as black, which served as a deterrent that maintained racial distinctions between the free and the enslaved, and implicitly denied that racial mingling could take place. Colonial law especially prohibited white females from sex with African men because of the additional complications that could arise from such unions. For example, if an indentured white woman bore a child by an African slave, who would support it, the woman’s or the man’s master? To resolve these legal conundrums, a 1664 Maryland law declared that if a white woman marry a slave, she “shall serve the master of such slave during the life of her husband; and... all the issues of such freeborne [sic] woman, so married, shall be slaves as their fathers were” (57). Reflecting the imperative of “white male dominance” over both slaves and women alike, such laws did little to prevent non-connubial sex between white men and African females due to assumptions about black women as sexually available and unworthy of protection. White women, however innately virtuous, were deemed susceptible to seduction and hence needful of paternalism. By the early 1700s all but three of the original thirteen colonies had legally forbidden interracial marriage.

Spanish and French colonies in North America were decidedly more tolerant of intermarriage in comparison to the British, and the Catholic Church played a significant role in promoting and defending mixed unions. In 1724 France did enact the Code Noir in Louisiana, banning marriage between blacks and whites largely against the wishes of the colonial population, but when the Spanish took over later in the century they never specifically outlawed matrimonial miscegenation. Restrictions did however come from the Spanish Crown’s attempt to prevent “unequal” marriages between differing social
classes in Spain, which ran contrary to the state’s interest in preserving the estates of wealthy families. These laws were later transferred to the colonies where class was often divided along racial lines, generating the same effect as British antimiscegenation laws. In Louisiana blacks and Indians constituted an underclass, and wealthier white Spaniards thereafter required permission to marry persons of color. Catholic priests in these areas often criticized these constraints and broke Spanish law by wedding couples of different classes and races to demonstrate their authority over the state in matters of matrimony. Still, in some parts of North America both the state and Catholic missionaries viewed intermarriage as a tool to conquer new lands. When Spanish soldiers and missionaries arrived California 1769, the soldiers frequently raped the native population in opposition to the moral and theological concerns of the priests. As this situation threatened any potential for conversion and peaceful settlement, the Catholic Church suggested that soldiers who married virgin natives be rewarded materially. The state agreed, offering farm animals and land for marriage in order to promote development in the region.

Botham endeavors to explain why such differences existed between the Protestant and Catholic regions. She argues that the Catholic doctrine of equality of all men under God influenced Spanish thinking (also citing their openness to manumission), while the Protestants denied such ideas. Competing theologies of marriage also emerged. The Spaniards’ considerable openness to intermarriage can be traced back to the Council of Trent’s (1563) designation of marriage as a sacrament, not to be interfered with by the state. Along with declaring that secular rulers had no jurisdiction over the Church, the Council affirmed the right of people to freely marry whomever they wished in an effort to curb state-sanctioned marriages of convenience between noble families. The principle of the consensual nature of the holy nuptial contract and the Catholic Church’s imperative to control marriage influenced Catholic thinking from that point onwards. In contrast, the Protestant theology of marriage derived from Martin Luther’s belief that only baptism and the Eucharist were sacraments, while the inclusion of marriage was not warranted by scripture. This view was subsequently seconded by John Calvin, who saw matrimony as merely “a legitimate ordinance of God” – sacred, but not a sacrament (78). In divesting their churches of the right to regulate marriage law, Protestants brought the two competing theologies into conflict, setting the stage for later battles between the two conceptions of marriage in the United States. Botham demonstrates that the Protestant theology of marriage predominated in the British colonies, “subtly fixing Protestant beliefs about marriage in American law” throughout New England and the South, and designating marriage as a civil institution best regulated by the state (79). She claims that this is a fact little noted by historians, which is vital to understanding how the Catholic theology of marriage later “created a ready space for Catholics to protest against anti-
miscegenation laws and to intervene on behalf of interracial couples whom American states prohibited from marrying” (86).

Conflicting theologies of race also marked the Catholic and Protestant positions on intermarriage in America. In the South, Protestants developed a “divine mandate for racial segregation” from a number of Biblical stories and hermeneutical traditions (93). The most important interpretation was that of Chapters 9 and 10 of Genesis. In the story, Noah curses his grandson Canaan with slavery, because his father Ham witnesses Noah naked and drunk. All Noah’s sons, Ham, Shem and Japheth, are then dispersed in three separate directions from their homeland to populate the Earth. Early Jewish interpreters believed that Shem went to Asia, Japheth to Europe, and Ham and Canaan to Africa, because the name Ham was linguistically similar to the Hebrew word for “dark,” or “black.” Therefore, all those with back skin carried “Noah’s curse,” which slowly developed as a rationalization of race-based slavery. Ham and Canaan became even more strongly associated with Africa in the 1500s due to greater European contact with Africa, further “racializing” the Genesis stories to justify slavery and explain the black skin and heathen nature of Africans. Such ideas transferred to the American colonies and survived into the nineteenth century, when proslavery advocates, many of who were Protestant ministers, invoked the story of Ham against abolitionists. After the full emancipation of the slaves in 1865, white Protestant Southerners perpetuated their racialized interpretation of Genesis to legitimize the Jim Crow regime and of course outlaw interracial marriage.

By the late 1800s the Catholic Church began to articulate its own theology of race, though to little effect in the US. Botham cites a number of historical sources from the Vatican, starting from the encyclical In Plurimis, written by Pope Leo XIII in celebration of Brazil’s ending of slavery in 1888. The document stressed humanity’s common ancestry in Adam and Eve, stated there was no biblical injunction for a separation of the races, and categorized “forgetfulness of our common nature” and “original brotherhood” as sin (113). In the 1930s the Vatican was forced to react to Nazi anti-Semitism, issuing an encyclical stating that exalting one race over another “distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God” (115). Shortly after the invasion of Poland, Pope Pius XII authored Summi Pontificatus (On the Unity of Human Society), which propounded the Catholic teachings that “God had created all humanity in God’s own image, united the human family in Adam and Eve, and redeemed it through Christ” (117). Also influential was the American Jesuit John LaFarge, whose Interracial Justice: A Study of the Catholic Doctrine of Race Relations argued that racial separation was contrary to biblical truth. Such ideas enabled progressive American Catholics to form a perspective on race issues and interracial unions much different from the Protestant vision. Botham,
however, concedes that there existed a large gap between the Catholic theology of race and the practices of average American Catholics, who affirmed segregation as wholeheartedly as Protestant Southerners. Nonetheless, she contends their prejudice was not Bible-based. Protestant theories of race fashioned in the South largely dominated in antimiscegenation cases. For example, in *Green v. State* (1877) an Alabama couple appealed for the right to wed on basis of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, but the court upheld the right of the state to regulate marriage, adding that “there cannot be any tyranny or injustice in requiring both alike to form this union with those of their own race only, whom God hath joined together with indelible peculiarities, which declare that He has made the two races distinct” (140). Such expressions became accepted wisdom, constituting “the Southern lingua franca of race” that permeated the North, East, and West of the country (159).

In her final chapter, Botham returns to both the *Perez* and *Loving* cases. *Perez* demonstrates how Catholic progressives such as attorney Daniel Marshall used both the Catholic theologies of race and marriage to challenge antimiscegenation law, while *Loving* begs the question of why Judge Bazile, though a Catholic, ruled against the Lovings. Ultimately, Bazile’s attitude towards the supposed divine imperative to separate the races clearly indicates that “a Protestant orientation towards the Bible” had achieved ubiquity in the United States (163). Bazile stands as symbol of what Botham deems a Catholic acquiescence to the Protestant theology of race and marriage, which made the Vatican’s theologies anathema to many American Catholics, save a few enlightened activists within the Church. This sound conclusion caps *Almighty God Created the Races*. Though Botham’s book provides an excellent historical account of the religious bases for antimiscegenation law, it is marred by an incongruous epilogue entitled “A Postmodernist’s Reflections on History and Knowledge.” After presenting her study, she tacks on a brief flurry of shallow ruminations on epistemology and hermeneutics (she curiously defines both terms for the reader, though she has already used them in the body), which quickly devolve into banal statements, such as: “And even though the words on the page of a text may remain the same over time, how people understand those words change. These change because people, not God, interpret the passages. [emphasis in original] People, not God, make claims about what its ‘God’s’ will, based on what they think they ‘know’” (189). Wholly unnecessary, the postscript does little but detract from a book that otherwise improves our understanding of intermarriage’s history in North America. But aside from this reservation, Botham has produced a solid effort that has much to recommend it.

Tadeusz Lewandowski

Malgorzata Poks’s *Thomas Merton and Latin America: a Consonance of Voices* fills in a vast gap in our knowledge about the output of the eponymous Catholic individualist, poet, thinker and Trappist. It exposes his dedication not only to the study of art and spirituality but also to the building of monastic and inter-cultural communities based on essential, universal religious values. In the “Conclusion” of the book one finds a particularly interesting passage:

Although not all of the translated poets [Latin American poets whose texts were translated by the Trappist – W. G.] shared Merton’s religious affiliation, their poems reveal the same spiritual awareness, sometimes expressed in terms of a secret (at times so ‘secretive’ that hidden from the poet’s conscious mind), of a common ground of reality that is both transcendent and immanent.... In the Latin American poetry of ‘life and hope’... man’s triumph over death is present, more often than not, only ‘kenotically,’ in consonance with the inverted logic of the Cross. To Merton – the professed monk, the paradigm of the Cross was more than a figure of thought. His poetic meditation is inscribed within the context of *inquisitio veritatis*, the search for truth, and the Cross becomes for him the fullest revelation of the Truth, defined in the optics of the Incarnation as a ‘Person... whose essence is to exist.’ (256)

This succinct summary of Merton’s attitude points to the mystery of person, of “the other,” at the core of religious and moral values Merton shared with such poets as Jorge Carrera Andrade, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Alfonso Cortes, Ernesto Cardenal, Pablo Cuadra, Nicanor Parra and Cesar Vellejo. At the same time, Ms Poks emphasizes a significant fact, namely that his study of Latin American poetry inevitably lead him to the topic that preoccupied his literary friends representing the Southern cultural circle, i.e. the truth about the indigenous past of that region, and its confrontation with imperial eruptions of its own and of invading Europeans:

Merton’s sophianic studies allowed him to make interesting connection between the wisdom books of the Bible, the prehistoric wisdom of Mesoamerican Indians, and the wisdom of Asia.... Mesoamerica’s ‘sacred cities,’ agricultural, indifferent to technological progress, and uncontaminated by the spirit of militarism, were built on the same values as the wisdom cultures of the East, Merton decided....
the traveling back to the lost world of the Maya or the Chorotega Indians had nothing
to do with a romantic renunciation of modernity. On the contrary, it was his
conviction that a poetic confrontation with the past should elucidate the root causes
the contemporary world’s predicament, as well as sensitise modern humans to the
ways of overcoming the crisis of Western culture. (255)

What this conclusion confirms is the central position of Merton’s search for earthly
spiritual paradise of a culture perfectly balancing awareness of transcendence with re-
spect for nature. It creates an effect of particular resonance with such of his theological
writings as “St. Bernard of Interior Simplicity,” New Man, and Zen and the Birds of
Appetite. Whether utopian or, on the contrary, realistic, this theme is vitally connected
with his social involvement and that of his poetic Latin American correspondents. Thus
it points to an important field of study to be addressed by other interpreters of Merton’s
writings alongside the poetry of South America.

Chapter VI, “The Early Legend that Returns: Thomas Merton, Ernesto Cardenal, and
Pablo Antonio Cuadra,” is a fascinating introduction into the historical drama of the Pre-
Conquest peoples of America. It signals the significance, for anthropological studies, of
the subject of the contrast between the classical, naturally balanced, traditions of the
Mayan civilization and their Toltec and Aztec successors. The study of Merton’s essays
and poems touching upon this theme brings out the motif of the contemporary Christian
examination of historical conscience linked with the background of Spanish and Anglo-
Saxon conquest of the New World. Chapter I, “Two Continents, One Destiny: The
American Hemisphere of Thomas Merton,” explains the deep sources of Merton’s in-
volveinent in the study of the Latin American past and present. At the heart of his moti-
vation Poks finds not only his criticism of the post-industrial North but also his sense of
complicity in its dualism and responsibility for the future of his society. While the sub-
chapter “The Meeting of Strangers” (of Chapter I) reads almost like a well written narra-
tive of action. The description of his initiation into the topic in question, of his encoun-
ters, friendships and correspondence with Latin American poets, offers an intriguing
story of their struggle for a new humanistic shape to their cultures and of Merton’s intel-
lectual journey into a world so close to the borders of North America and so distant from
it in terms of mentality. The fact that the story develops on the background of violent
political changes in that region adds the sense of tragic tension. At the same time, it
exposes the tremendous impact, not fully realized yet, of Merton’s poems, essays and
translations on a literary environment of the Spanish-speaking and Portuguese South.
They show that his encounter with it was an event of exceptional importance. In order
not to spoil the ultimate effect I leave the details to the reader’s own inquisitiveness.
Chapters discussing Merton’s translations, and, at the same time, interpretations, of Latin American poets are instructive. Penetrating analyses, presented by Poks, are a mine of testimonies concerning Merton’s poetic empathy, richness of personalities of the poets he translated, and their deep contemplative wisdom. Obviously, political allusions of some of these texts and ideological affiliations of such poets as Cardenal require more extended commentaries or even a dose of criticism. However, Merton’s willingness to keep up a deep dialogue with them, despite the differences of social philosophies, and to give witness to the Christian attitude, leaves little margin for commentators of his work. At the same time, his approach suggests that criticism should be preceded by a close understanding of the psychological condition and the external context, which in the Latin American case is especially difficult. Moreover, his focus on the literary qualities of translated texts, as well as on their spiritual and humanistic messages exposes the quality of poetry that makes it a hopeful plain of understanding across ideological divides.

One of the passages which arrest the reader’s attention with unusual intensity is the reading of a poem (Merton’s translation of it) “The Truth” of a Nicaraguan poet loco, “mad poet,” Alfonso Cortés: “Fate is dead. God is in man / What man is in God. Art caves in / Upon itself. Truth is a name / Reason a dilemma: all is a tomb.”

With deep intuitive empathy, Małgorzata Poks explains the poet’s insight: “The death of Fate announces the resurrection of God and the awakening of man to a new destiny: that of freedom in Christ.” (125) The rest could have been left for silence, if this were the end of the poem. But the meditation continues, and it is for each reader to follow the rest of it as well as the whole wealth of the remaining interpretations.

Wacław Grzybowski


 Świat nie scalony is the latest, seventh addition to a series published by Biuro Literackie under the umbrella of “Estetyka. Poetyka. Pragmatyka” (Esthetics. Poetics. Pragmatics). The very name of the formula encourages the kind of writing that Bartczak refers to in a passage that made its way to the book jacket: “to approach poetry from a holistic, non-dualist perspective that would allow to speak of it not in terms of separate spaces of the material world, such as body, memory or language, but as a kind of tool that facilitates a smooth exchange and transition from one of those spheres into another” (10; trans. A.W.). Elsewhere in the Introduction, commenting on the possibility of
a pragmatic poetics, he adds: “The book I’m putting forth doesn’t deal strictly with poetry, philosophy or theory; it emerges from the liminal spaces between those fields…. Any attempt to read those philosophers without making references to poets would be incomplete” (11). Pragmatic thinkers, continues Bartczak, remained open to the possibility of correction or addenda to their work from the field of poetry and the notions of exchange, co- and interrelation, and interstices from and through which meanings are born also characterize the discussion that Bartczak himself holds with his texts. He confesses: “Eventually, I started to treat poems as I would treat an odd and unpredictable conversation partner, who not only talks to me, but also acts towards me” (10). Indeed, the object of Bartczak’s analysis – that which emerges from the liminal spaces of poetics, esthetics and pragmatics – also becomes his method.

Seeing a potential instead of a dreaded hiatus in the openness (or incompleteness, “the post-romantic discontinuity that we live in”; 14), is what distinguishes Harold Bloom from Paul de Man, writes Bartczak in the first essay of the volume. Where de Man focuses on the gap, Bloom directs his attention to the potentiality of a jump or a bridge, the poetic trope: the first critic “is transfixed by the paralysis”, the latter “continues to speak of open possibilities” of the self-aware text (15). To counter possible accusations of the propagation of the notion of deep structures on the existence of which Bloom appears to be insisting, Bartczak proposes to read the Yale scholar the way Bloom himself reads Emerson, almost against him. In the result, Bloom’s vision of the poetics of indeterminacy, says Bartczak, is richer than that of Marjorie Perloff, whose undoubtedly exquisite readings still tend to bring out the incapacities rather than the potentiality of the poetic text:

Instead of throwing us into an un-world, this conceptual breakthrough [the abandonment of great unifying meta-narratives] proposes a new kind of being in the world. The reading of poets such as Ashbery, and critics such as Bloom, appears to suggest that there is an alternative. In order to exist, the world does not require totality. The lack of a unifying principle facilitates the making of a completely new world: dynamically transient, dependent on the perceptual gift of the subject / poet, prone to fall apart and yet, a world nonetheless. (23)

A separate essay in the volume, paradoxically entitled “Poetyka totalna Johna Ashbery’ego” (The total poetics of John Ashbery) is devoted the poet championed both by Perloff and Bloom. One infers that this time under the notion of “totality” Bartczak understands the completely open and hospitable character of Ashbery’s poetic language (and not any form of an all-encompassing universalism):
Ashbery... has shown not only how diversified the sources of the poetic language might be but also highlighted the network of relations between poetry and the remaining spheres of life. Through its connections to other art forms, philosophy, even science, poetry reaches a capacity much greater than that assumed by traditional aesthetics based on the strict separation of cultural disciplines, discourses and expert cultures. (100)

Bartczak proposes to Ashbery with the help of William James whom he calls a proto-deconstructivist for breaking up with the notion of a monolithic world and declaring that “things are with each other in many ways but nothing includes everything or dominates over everything” (87). The indiscriminating openness and generous hospitality of Ashbery’s poetic language to other fields of human activity is compared to a hotel, a recurrent trope in his work. Hosting numerous guests and voices, holding several rooms, the hotel a polymorphous and ever-changing space: “The poem is none of the separate rooms: it’s only a hypothesis of their contiguity, a walk through and from one into another” (92). Elsewhere, Bartczak writes that reading Ashbery resembles walking through a building “in which each splendidly illuminated room reveals itself as a passage into another one” (197).

The metaphor of the hotel also applies to Bartczak’s own book: it is in the liminal spaces of its rooms – poetics, esthetics and pragmatics - that the object of his inquiry begins to emerge. Świat nie scalony contains theoretical essays sketching out the conceptual plane of his analysis (pragmatism, organicism, the abandonment of the idea of the transcendental character of language), as well as readings of selected poets and schools of poetry whose texts seem to perform what philosophy only describes. Bartczak examines manifestations of the pragmatic tradition in the poems of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and Wallace Stevens in the context of the Emersonian view of language, and the non-dualism of language and body in the work of Miron Białoszewski and Gertrude Stein. He talks about “texts that act” in his discussion of Robert Creeley, Andrzej Sosnowski, Piotr Sommer and John Ashbery, and the relation between the poetics of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, the New York painting and the New York poetry in his review of Piotr Sommer’s anthology of translations. A separate room is allotted to Richard Rorty’s “literary culture,” but Rorty’s voice and thought seem to vibrate through all adjacent spaces.

Bartczak never ceases to remind us that his book is an account of a series of personal conversations he’s been holding with the texts he presents. It is also an attempt to open the reading process to the possibilities offered by the pragmatic approach. In its insistence on the importance of the in-between it offers a new way of problematizing the gap, seeing the beginning where others saw the end.

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