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Bożenna Chylińska

The Colonial American Working Wife and Her Dear and Loving Husband Absent upon Some Public Employment: Deborah and Benjamin Franklin's Married Life

Abstract: Although historians recognize Deborah Franklin's abilities and accomplishments, she invariably suffers in comparison with her famous husband. She seems to have shared the fate of Anne Bradstreet a century earlier, whose worldly spouse, Simon, for years remained object of his wife's tender affection and dutiful supervision of his affairs. The article attempts to examine and evaluate Mrs. Franklin's immeasurable contribution to the Franklin household and business, which enabled Benjamin to act on the international arena and indulge in the frivolities of the contemporary high life, against his egalitarian declarations.

Keywords: Franklin, Bradstreet, marriage, Puritanism, ethic, work

More than anyone else in his time, Benjamin Franklin expounded, interpreted, and defined the cultural reality of eighteenth-century British Colonial America. Franklin, the Enlightenment sage, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, a leading author, printer, politician, scientist and noted inventor, statesman, diplomat, and a friend of mankind, in many ways brought forward Cotton Mather's Puritanism into the much more secular Age of Reason in philosophy, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution in politics.

Benjamin Franklin was born in 1706 in Boston which, although no longer a Puritan outpost, was a prospering commercial center sheltering preachers and ministers on the one hand, and merchants and seamen on the other. Benjamin's father, Josiah Franklin, burdened with a large family of 17 children, was unable to pay for a college education of his youngest son. Consequently, at the age of ten, after only two years of education, Benjamin Franklin left Boston Latin School which was to prepare him for Harvard to study ministry. Thus Benjamin's "Harvard" were the training and experience of a printer, publisher, and newspaperman, which were enlightening enough to make him one of the most practical

business strategists and entrepreneurs of Boston and Philadelphia, and—through such virtues as diligence, frugality, and honesty, achieved by self-improvement practice and civic-improvement schemes—a beneficent member of his community. In 1718, at the age of twelve, Benjamin started serving as an apprentice to his elder brother James at his print shop. At the time, James printed the *Boston Gazette*, a paper established by Boston Postmaster William Booker. Significantly, throughout his life, Benjamin would always refer to himself as "B. Franklin, printer."

Unquestionably, the complexity of Benjamin Franklin's character and achievement resulted from his unorthodox Puritan upbringing. By assuming the Protestant ethic considerably separated from dogma Franklin developed his own pragmatic self-awareness reflected in his religiosity approached from a practical, rather than theological angle. In his philosophy, as well as in his personal life, a sense of values was instrumental; he valued wealth not as an end in itself but as a necessary means to enjoy his personal aims and the real ends of society. In his writings he frequently used the terms denoting money, wealth, and business because he was addressing those who commonly thought in the same way. It has to be remembered that Franklin was not a single-handed creator of New England' novel moral standards; his glorification of commercialism followed the decline, or the change, rather, of the Puritan morals, revealed particularly in the growing tolerance for wealth. Logically, however, wealth could not be achieved without work. Therefore, it was not that the Puritan standards deteriorated; they became more universal and more enlightened, and Franklin attempted to usefully accommodate them for the common benefit. Consequently, much of what he demonstrated was an expression of a unique combination of the eighteenth-century philosophies, a typical background of colonial Boston and Philadelphia, as well as the emerging American character whose qualities Franklin himself represented.

Admittedly, making money and acquiring wealth appear today to be the ultimate goals of human life. Economic acquisition is no longer confined to the necessity to provide oneself with the necessaries of life or to satisfy one's material needs. This change has become instrumental for the development of capitalism. At the same time, the reversal in attitude to economic motives was strictly directed by a certain religious outlook. According to Benjamin Franklin's personal economic ethic, known virtually from all his works, earning money, if done legally and honestly, was the clear expression of virtue and the result of proficiency in a calling. Unquestionably, Franklin's economic ethic, based on the Protestant theology of one's duty in a calling, is the most characteristic precept of the social ethic of capitalist culture, and can be viewed as one of its fundamentals. "It is an obligation," claims Max Weber, "which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists, in particular no

matter whether it appears on the surface as a utilization of his personal powers, or only of his material possessions (as capital)" (19).

It is very probable that Benjamin Franklin would not have been afforded the time or freedom to pursue his passions for politics and science or his social and reformist inclinations, which led him to prominence, if not for his wife, Deborah Read. After running away from Boston to Philadelphia in 1723, he found his first Philadelphia lodging in the house of Mrs. Read, his future mother-in-law.

Franklin became practical about what he expected from a wife. After leaving the lodging he was frequently invited to Mrs. Read, to whose daughter, Deborah, he then had made "some Courtship" and had "a great Respect & Affection for her, and had some Reason to believe she had the same for me" (Franklin, *Autobiography* 40). However, a long voyage to England that Franklin then planned made Deborah's mother postpone their marriage until his return. Yet his long silence when in London was understood as a break of promises on his part and made Miss Read decide to marry, on August 5, 1725, apparently at the insistence of her mother, someone named John Rogers, a potter, who deserted her soon after their marriage, leaving for Barbados and taking Deborah's dowry with him. There were uncertified reports that Rogers had abandoned a wife in England. Rumors of his death, though for long not confirmed, later opened the way for her and Benjamin to get married. After his return in 1726, Franklin resumed courtship to Deborah: "I pity'd poor Miss Read's unfortunate Situation, who was generally dejected, seldom cheerful, and avoided Company.… Our mutual Affection was revived, but there were now great Objections to our Union.… And tho' there was a Report of his Death, it was not certain" (76). They managed to overcome all the difficulties and got married on 1 September, 1730. However, there was no official ceremony; they entered into a common-law marriage, that is without formal approval by religious or civil authorities as there still was a chance that John Rogers might unexpectedly reappear. Such a marriage arrangement protected them from charges of bigamy.

Not much is known of Deborah's earlier life; her biographical details come from indirect sources and are mostly of secondary importance. Even the year of her birth, 1705 or 1707, is not certain. Although her life is hardly mentioned in her husband's *Autobiography*, he recorded there their first meeting on a Sunday morning in October 1723 "when she standing at the Door saw me, & thought I made as I certainly did a most awkward ridiculous Appearance" (28). Deborah was rather plain, but she offered the prospect of comfort and domesticity, and, indeed, through their forty-four years of marriage, she would prove herself a woman of extraordinary ambition and character, with a natural gift for business and a deep commitment to her family. Franklin would

later recall: "None of the Inconveniences happened that we had apprehended, she prov'd a good & faithful Helpmate, assisted me much by attending the Shop, we throve together, and have ever mutually endeavor'd to make Each other happy" (*Autobiography* 76).

Benjamin Franklin is often described as (or rather accused of) being far more practical than romantic, a "man of the head, rather than heart" (Isaacson 75). A narrative of his common-law marriage to Deborah Read justifies this view. Benjamin was not a poetic lover; his emotional attachments turned to be the more prosaic bonds of affection developed out of partnership, self-interest, cooperation as well as mutual benevolence, respect, and good-humored affinity. His strong conviction was that a wife who brought with her a dowry would most probably have also brought expensive social aspirations and costly material expectations. Therefore, instead, Franklin found "a good and faithful helpmate," frugal, practical, and devoid of worldly pretensions—the grand Puritan virtues which for a rising tradesman proved to be of a fundamental value. Deborah and Benjamin's practical marriage, if not romantic and poetical, had remained mutually useful until Mrs. Franklin's death in 1774.

Franklin disclosed his opinions about marriage and family in numerous pieces of his writing. A deserved importance has always been attached to his abundant correspondence, for hereby are unfolded his motives and the values he advocated, as well as his extraordinary abilities to expound and explain his stance and ideas, acknowledged both by his friends and enemies. The unpretentious, unambiguous, at times prophetic tone of his letters, and the style of Puritan simplicity by which they are regarded and recommended as models of epistolary composition—although certainly not written with a view to publication—unveil the philosopher, the man of business, reformer, and legislator, yet, most of all, the moralist and the familiar friend, though, occasionally lacking humility and modesty, which he himself vainly fought to restrain. Therefore, in his letters he would open his mind and provide his ingenuous opinions on matters of science and policy, yet also, no less effectively, on the conduct of private life. Thus his correspondence offers practical wisdom on subjects of private and social life, as well as the best instruction and guidance both to the political leaders and to his "leather-apron" class. He would frequently respond to the demands of his friends and colleagues who asked him for opinion and advice on a variety of aspects of everyday life. In his 9 August, 1768 letter to John Alleyne, Esq. (1740–1777), a London attorney and a friend, author of a small volume entitled *Legal Degrees of Matrimony, Stated and Considered in a Series of Letters to a Friend with an Appendix, Containing Letters from Several Divines and Others*, published in 1774, Franklin shared his views on early marriages, displaying different aspects of the issue, moral, personal, and social:

Craven Street [London], August 9, 1768

Dear Jack,

> You desire, you say, my impartial thoughts on the subject of an early marriage, by way of answer to the numberless objections that have been made by numerous persons to your own. You may remember, when you consulted me on the occasion, that I thought youth on both sides to be no objection. Indeed, from the marriages that have fallen under my observation, I am rather inclined to think, that early ones stand the best chance for happiness. The tempers and habits of young people are not yet become so stiff and uncomplying, as when more advanced in life; they form more easily to each other, and hence many occasions of disgust are removed. And if youth has less of that prudence that is necessary to manage a family, yet the parents and elder friends of young married persons are generally at hand to afford their advice, which amply supplies that defect; and by early marriage, youth is sooner formed to regular and useful life; and possibly some of those accidents, habits or connections, that might have injured either the constitution, or the reputation, or both, are thereby happily prevented.…
>
> Late marriages are often attended, too, with this further inconvenience, that there is not the same chance the parents shall live to see their offspring educated.…
>
> With us in America, marriages are generally in the morning of life; our children are therefore educated and settled in the world by noon; and thus, our business being done, we have an afternoon and evening of cheerful leisure to ourselves.…
>
> By these early marriages we are blessed with more children; and from the mode among us, founded in nature, if every mother suckling and nursing her own child, more of them are raised. Thence the swift progress of population among us, unparalleled in Europe. (Franklin to Alleyne)

In the conclusion of his letter to Alleyne, Franklin disclosed his clearly Puritan morality, as the promoter of the marriage and family values which reflected his childhood and early youth Puritan upbringing, and the seventeenth-century New England preaching of the family ethic:

> In fine, I am glad you are married, and congratulate you most cordially upon it. You are now in the way of becoming a useful citizen; and you have escaped the unnatural state of celibacy for life—the fate of many here, who never intended it, but who having too long postponed the change of their condition, find, at length, that it is too late to think of it, and so live all their lives in a situation that greatly lessens a man's virtue…. [W]hat think you of the odd half of a pair of scissors? [I]t can't well cut any thing.…
>
> Pray make my compliments and best wishes acceptable to your bride […]. I shall make but small use of the old man's privilege, that of giving advice to younger friends. Treat you wife always with respect; it will procure respect to you, not only from her, but from all that observe it. Never use a slighting expression to her, even in jest, for slights in jest […] are apt to end in angry earnest. Be studious in your profession, and you will be learned. Be industrious and frugal, and you will be rich. Be sober and temperate, and you will be healthy. Be in

> general virtuous, and you will be happy. At least, you will, by such conduct, stand the best chance for such consequences.
>
> I pray God to bless you both; being ever your affectionate friend,
> Franklin. (Franklin to Alleyne)

The contribution of Mrs. Franklin to the stability of their marriage and to her husband's personal comfort cannot be overestimated. Very luckily for Benjamin, Deborah tended, or well pretended, to share her husband's practical views on marriage and the role of a female in a domestic settlement. She displayed plain tastes; neither did she participate in her husband's social life nor shared his intellectual, scientific and political interests. Her fear of ocean voyages prevented her from accompanying Benjamin in his overseas travels; on the other hand, she could have been afraid that her plain appearance and lack of worldly manners would embarrass her husband in his elegant European society. However, she had a willingness to live cheaply and economically, and she enjoyed the work both in her household and outside, as she also managed the family's book and stationary shop, and a general store. It is noteworthy that the Franklins, at least in the early years of their marriage, did not keep servants. She thus was not merely a submissive or meek partner but a smart businesswoman and a witty manager, handling most of her husband's business accounts and expanding their general shop's inventory to include ointments made by her mother, who sold her "well-known Ointment for the ITCH," crown soap made by Franklin's Boston relatives, also coffee, tea, chocolate, saffron, cheese, fish, and various other sundries, from medicine to feathers and lottery tickets (Isaacson 80–81). The zealous Puritan Bathsheba—Deborah Read Rogers Franklin—tirelessly strained her eyes stitching pamphlets and binding books as well as sewing clothes by candlelight. Franklin's affection for his wife grew from his pride at her industry. Many years into their marriage, when in London he was addressing the House of Commons, claiming that unfair taxes would cause the boycotts of British manufacturers, he proudly boasted that as a young tradesman he had only worn clothes made by the spinning wheel of his wife. Amazingly, in Deborah's fierce temper and fiery character Franklin saw not a scolding wife but an assertive woman, smart enough to manage both the household and the family business. Shortly after their marriage, he wrote a little pamphlet, amusing yet certainly well meant, entitled "A Scolding Wife," for the July 5, 1733 issue of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, in which he defended such assertive women:

> Sir,
> 'Tis an old saying and true one, that *there is no Conveniency without an Inconveniency*: For aught I know, there might be a saying not less true, though more new, that *there is no Inconveniency without a Conveniency*. However, there is

> the inconveniency (as 'tis commonly thought) of a Scolding Wife, which was conveniencies enough in it, to make it (when rightly considered) esteemed a happiness. For I speak from experience, (as well as a long course of observation) women of that character have generally sound and healthy constitutions, produce a vigorous offspring, are active in the business of the family, special good housewives, and very careful of their husband's interest. As to the noise attending all this, 'tis but a trifle when a man is used to it, and observes that 'tis only a mere habit , an exercise, in which all is well meant, and ought to be well taken.… 'Tis my opinion, in short, that their freedom of speech springs from a sense they have, that they do their duty in every part towards their husbands [.] (57; italics original)

Strikingly, such convictions, and so openly articulated, far exceeded seventeenth-century traditional Calvinist Puritan stance; they clearly not only honored female frugality, industry, and meekness but also respected some of her freedoms, abilities and, in a sense, her integrity, all of them unaccepted before. His Puritanism, therefore, must have been tainted by the ideas of liberalism and tolerance, formulated by the Enlightenment.

As was frequently noted here, the Franklins' marital relations were not romantic, nor did they inspire great poetry. Though the couple shared the practical values of their union, Mrs. Franklin did not participate in her husband's social life and was not part of his worldly aspirations. However, after twelve years of their marriage, Benjamin did compose some lovable verses in which he honored his "Plain Country Joan" and praised the day of their wedding. In the mode of the early Boston Puritan preachers, and in an unsophisticated manner, he enumerated the most required virtues of the eighteenth-century good wife:

> Of their Chloes and Phyllises poets may prate,
> I sing my plain country Joan,
> These twelve years my wife, still the joy of my life,
> Blest day that I made her my own.
>
> Not a word of her face, of her shape or her air,
> Or of flames, or of darts, you shall hear;
> I beauty admire, but virtue I prize,
> That fades not in seventy year.
>
> Am I loaded with care, she takes off a large share,
> That the burden ne'er makes me to reel;
> Does good fortune arrive, the joy of my life
> Quite doubles the pleasure I feel.
>
> She defends my good name, even when I'm to blame,
> Firm friend as to ma e'er was given'

Her compassionate breast feels for all the distressed,
….

In health a companion delightful and dear,
  Still easy, engaging, and free;
In sickness no less than the carefulest nurse,
  As tender as tender can be.

In peace and good order my household she guides,
  Right careful to save what I gain;
Yet cheerfully spends, and smiles on the friends
  I've the pleasure to entertain.
….

Were the finest young princess, with millions in purse,
  To be had in exchange for my Joan,
I could not get better wife, might get a worse
  So I'll stick to my dearest old Jane. (92–93)

It is hard to speculate how sincere was Franklin's confession about millions wasted for Deborah; it could have been merely the figurative style of the romantic exultation. The Franklins' marriage for forty-four years was a happy one, which was revealed in their abundant correspondence, a great source of information about their thoughts, feelings, and everyday conduct. Benjamin and Deborah exchanged a few hundred letters which clearly show that a very deep affection developed between them. As already noted, by Deborah's constant devotion to her husband's interests, Benjamin had the luxury of retiring from business in 1748 at the age of forty-two, and of devoting energies to science and to public service. Franklin's retirement, however, also had a negative side; it allowed him to spend many years in Europe without his wife. Whereas she seems never to have spent a night away from Philadelphia, he spent long periods of time overseas, serving as a representative of the colonial government. For fifteen of the last seventeen years of their separation, although the efforts at economy were mainly directed at Deborah, their mutual affection, respect, loyalty, and a sense of partnership, endured. Deborah's letters to her husband, awkward and revealing the lack of education, conveyed, like Anne Bradstreet's poems to Simon, both her strength and loneliness. Deborah coped with Benjamin's absence, as she herself admitted in her letters, by cleaning her house, and she tried hard not to bother him with her worries. Franklin's letters were kind and chatty, more paternalistic than conveying romantic feelings, perhaps too courteous and gallant at times, and not intellectually engaging as compared to Franklin's correspondence with other female addressees. They, however, disclose Benjamin's devotion to his sensible and practical wife, and his genuine fondness of her accommodating nature. The letters mostly focused

on personal matters and they opened with tender terms. Only in the later years did the letters become brief and more business-oriented, reflecting their growing sense of separation. In 1774, Deborah received the last letter from her husband, in which he unusually referred to her as "My Dear Love." However, after a stroke which resulted in paralysis, she was too ill to respond or even to acknowledge it. She died on 19th December of that year, a few month before Benjamin's return.

Deborah Franklin was a poor writer and a bad speller. Her autograph letters are extremely rare. One of them, dated July 14, 1757, probably addressed to the family's friend, clearly testifies to Mrs. Franklin's bad orthography:

> This day I reseived yours and it was the more exceptabell as I have been verey ill. I have had a bad cold and fever it did not leve me for 48 owers and gave me much pain indead, but it gon of agin thank god for his mersey to me. I have bin in much pain for sum day on a Counts of my Husband for by this time he is as I suppose near the lands-end of Ingland and of Corse in danger by being taken which I pray god prevented.… Sally Franklin shall write to you and I shall a steem it a verey graite faver if you will write to her agin . Shee is a larning French I had no desire of her larning that Language, but shee desired it herself and her master ses shee is a good gurle. Shee has bin a week to-day at it. Shee will give you an a Count of it herself. (D. Franklin. Letter)

The salutation on her letters to Benjamin usually was like his on the letters to herself: "My Dear Child," and her valediction would be: "I am your afeckshenit wife." However, despite her frequent misspelling and choice of words, which reflected her meager education, her abundant, virtually inexhaustible entries in their shop book she scrupulously kept, provide a great source of knowledge of the Franklin family's as well as their "leather-aproned" class' lives and habits, and they altogether constitute a splendid record of the times.

Significantly, as Sheila Skemp notes in her essay entitled "Family Partnerships: The Working Wife, Honoring Deborah Franklin," Mrs. Franklin's contributions to the family business, even her fiery character and frequent "aggressive" behavior, were not unique in eighteenth-century Colonial America. Contemporary middle-class women who claimed to be industrious and frugal "businessmen" "did not pretend to be protected flowers; they did not sit demurely upon a pedestal that both elevated and confined them" (19). However, precisely like in seventeenth-century New England, their contributions to the economic and domestic welfare of the family did not give them power, authority, or independence in the household; much less so in the wider world. The gender-based power in the social relations and in consequent role divisions, both within the family and in the public sphere, was measured by a clear line of importance between males and females. Even though in the eighteenth century, the division between home and work, male and female responsibilities, remained flexible and fluid, men were the unquestioned

authorities in political affairs. They were also the heads of their households; the patriarchs who reared children, dispensed discipline, taught morals, manners, and educational skills, and enjoyed ultimate authority in domestic matters. Women were responsible for certain gender-defined tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and care of small children. But their help was also needed and expected in the shop or on the farm. So long as a woman acted with her husband's permission, and for the family benefit, she could perform many duties later reserved for men. Performing those duties, however, could not threaten her husband's dominance or her own "femininity."

Although historians unalterably recognize Deborah Franklin's abilities and skills, listing her many accomplishments, they rather pity her than they praise her. Her case is relatively a rarity; she invariably suffers in comparison with her famous spouse. In a common perception, Benjamin Franklin's work was significant, Deborah's was not; his letters home were witty and courteous, reflecting joy and optimism, intellect and worldly interests; hers were poorly written, at times almost incomprehensible, filled with melancholy, complaints, minute descriptions of seemingly insignificant particulars about the family and neighbors. She seems to have shared the fate of Anne Bradstreet a century before her, whose worldly husband Simon, a man of considerable political importance and social prominence on both sides of the Atlantic, for years remained a remote object of his wife's tender affection, passion, and care. Fragile as she was, and suffering from a long-lasting, incurable illness, Anne would run the household, raise the children, keep the accounts and the household inventory, manage the servants, receive her husband's distinguished guests and, in the rare moments of solitude, she would devote her resting time to writing the poem letters to her "Dear and Loving Husband" frequently absent "Upon Some Public Employment." Most significantly, those women should greatly be acknowledged for their ability to write at all. In seventeenth-century Colonial America, female education was a matter of fortune and of the social class; writing poetry by women authors was additionally a matter of uncommon talent and self-discipline in the hostile social surroundings of the gender-based role divisions. Most of the mid-eighteenth century American women did write and read, and Deborah could probably do it better then many of them. That she was bad at orthography and punctuation did not correspond to her intelligence or personal charm. Admittedly, neither Simon Bradstreet nor Benjamin Franklin seemed to ever have been supportive, giving particular encouragement, or offering tender care to their wives in their daily hardships.

Deborah's material contributions to the Franklin household were considerable. She may not have brought a dowry to her marriage, however, in 1729, her mother, Sarah White Read, had obtained clear ownership of her late husband, John Read's former property on Market Street in Philadelphia and, in 1734, she divided the

eastern half of that lot, as well as a dwelling house, between her two sons-in- law: Francis Cooker and Benjamin Franklin. This may abolish a quite common theory that Deborah throughout her married life was humbly and pitifully grateful to Benjamin for marrying her. Clearly, Benjamin, no less then Deborah, should have been grateful to have won such an attractive partner, the more so that he had no family connections in Philadelphia, was still in debt, and his prospects at that time remained doubtful (Riley 239–40).

As already noted, after getting married, Deborah Franklin was wife, cook, seamstress, shop keeper, and accountant. She kept track of the purchases and sales that she made, and she also assisted her husband in his printing establishment. Not infrequently, did she carry out complex transactions. Furthermore, after 1737, when Franklin became the Postmaster of Philadelphia, running yet another business from the family dwelling, Deborah instantly assumed partial responsibility for postal affairs. Therefore, Deborah's contribution to the prosperity of the Franklin family in those years was immeasurable. As discussed before, strikingly yet typically, Deborah Franklin's involvement in the family business gave her neither power nor independence. Like Anne Bradstreet, Deborah was proud of her accomplishments, and like Anne, she may have enjoyed her work in her husband's printing establishment or in the post office. However, like her famous predecessor, she performed her services in the name of the family, not as a means of advancing her individual pursuits. If they both made the history of American culture, it is because their identities as well as their sense of purpose, importance, and security were all measured by their roles as wives and mothers; as the Founding Wives and Mothers.

Indeed, no less significantly, Deborah was a mother as well. She gave birth to two children, a boy named Francis "Franky" Folger Franklin ("Folger" was Benjamin's mother, Mrs. Abiah Franklin's maiden name), born in 1732, and a daughter, Sarah, born in 1743. Sarah, familiarly called "Sally," thanks to her father's special personal care, may have been the broadest educated woman in the colonies. Deborah also raised as her own her husband's illegitimate son, William, born shortly after their wedding, and whom Benjamin publicly acknowledged. Franky died at the age of four of smallpox.

As mentioned earlier, Franklin publicly acknowledged an illegitimate son, named William, born between 12 April, 1730, and 12 April, 1731, later the last Loyalist governor of New Jersey. While William's mother remains unidentified, it is possible that the sole custody of an infant child gave Benjamin Franklin an immediate reason to take up residence with Deborah Read, despite all the formal difficulties. Thus William was raised in the Franklin household, and treated by Deborah like her own child. On April 12, 1750, in the letter to his "Honoured Mather," Benjamin proudly wrote of his son: "As to your Grandchildren, Will is

now nineteen years of age, a tall proper Youth, and much of a Beau. He acquired a Habit of Idleness on the Expedition [Franklin refers here to 1746 when William was an officer in the Pennsylvania forces raised for an expedition against Canada in that year] but begins of late to apply himself to Business and I hope will become an industrious Man. He imagin'd his Father had got enough for him, but I have assured him that I intend to spend what little I have myself, if it please God that I live long enough; and, as he by no means wants Sense, he can see by my going on, that I am like to be as good as my Word" (B. Franklin to A. Franklin). In about 1760, William followed in his father's footsteps by acknowledging his own illegitimate son, William Temple Franklin, known as Temple. He soon became a beloved grandchild to Benjamin who took special care to educate him.

William had good relations with his stepmother; his attachment to her was demonstrated in a letter to his father, sent to London on Christmas Eve of 1774, in which he informed Benjamin of the death of Deborah on 19 December, reproaching his father in painful words for his not being at home:

> Philadelphia, Dec. 24, 1774
>
> Hon'd Father:
>
> I came here on Thursday last to attend the funeral of my poor old mother, who died the Monday noon preceding. Mr. Bache [Richard Bache, Sara's husband] sent his clerk express to me on the occasion, who reached Amboy on Tuesday evening.… I was not able to reach here till about 4 o'clock on Thursday afternoon, about half an hour before the corpse was to be moved from interment. Mr. Bache and I followed as chief mourners… and a very respectable number of the inhabitants were at the funeral.… She told me when I took leave of her on my removal to Amboy, that she never expected to see you unless you returned this winter, for that she was sure she should not live till next summer. I heartily wish you had happened to have come over in the fall, as I think her disappointment in that respect prayed a good deal on her spirit. (W. Franklin to B. Franklin 59)

And further William mocks at his "Honoured Father," assuring him that "It gives me great pleasure to find that you have so perfect an enjoyment of that greatest of blessings, health. But I cannot help being concerned to find that notwithstanding you are so sensible that you… postpone your return to your family.… Hon'd sir, your dutiful son, WM. Franklin" (62). Clearly, William wants his father to feel guilty for his dutiful wife's long suffering until she died "after the paralytick stroke she received some time ago, which greatly affected her memory and understanding" (60), while he was enjoying life in London, practicing frugality, as he claimed, but yet also indulgence.

Benjamin Franklin spent almost one-third of his life in Europe, "upon some public employment." He served first in England, for seventeen years, as a diplomat for colonial America, and then, for nine years in France, as a diplomatic envoy of the United States. His worldly achievements gained him the reputation of a great genius, a sophisticated sage, an inventive scientist and a promoter of moral and political truths. His writings were extolled as the ones transmitting the humanistic values of the Enlightenment. He was well aware of, and at times amused by, his image of the world's most famous American, a courtier, a tribune of liberty as well as a symbol of virtue and wisdom. In England he established a comfortable household with close friends serving him as the requisite family. As described by his biographer, Walter Isaacson, Benjamin Franklin's life in London was "a middle-class mix of frugality and indulgence" and "his efforts at economy were mainly directed at his wife" (234).

In France Franklin, hallowed as a celebrity, lived in the grand style which, he thought, was expected of someone of his stature. Surrounded by a broad circle of his fellow politicians, female admirers, and other acquaintances, he was indulging himself in the frivolities of his courtly existence. Such an idyllic life detached him from Deborah, both by distance and by emotions; he continued to send to his long-suffering wife paternalistic in tone and business- oriented short notes (instead of actual letters), most of which contained enigmatic references to his own health and to his determined attempts at "preserving" it, as he would frequently admit. It is noteworthy, however, that in his testament, written in 1757, upon his departure to England, Benjamin Franklin highly regarded Deborah as a business partner. Although he equally divided his estate among his wife, son, and daughter, leaving each of them with a share of the income from his printing enterprise, his estate, and one thousand pounds, through an additional bequest to Deborah, by which she would inherit the right to two houses and lots on Market Street in Philadelphia as well as all his household goods, he recognized her special contribution to the family economic status. This bequest essentially exceeded his son William's share, and was far more substantial than the traditional "widow's third" of personal property (Reed Fry 190). Deborah did not live to enjoy the bequeathed fortune. It may be noteworthy here that shortly before Benjamin Franklin died (on 17 April, 1790), he ordered a simple epitaph to be placed over the grave site that he would share with his wife. The marble tombstone inscription was to read "Benjamin and Deborah Franklin."

* * *

Defining Deborah Franklin in Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's terms, she was, typically, a "deputy husband," a woman who responsibly stood in her husband's place during

his absence; who, however, considered her task a duty and obligation, rather, and frequently a burden, not an opportunity for advancement (35). As Thatcher Ulrich rightly argued, eighteenth-century American women had never been denied the ability to serve as their husbands' replacement. On the contrary, the refusal on the part of the woman to perform that task would estrange her from her family and friends alike. But, as suggested before, serving as a deputy husband gained her neither equality nor independence; she was allowed and encouraged to assume responsibility for her absent husband's duties as long as she did not challenge the family or community structure, based on patriarchal authority and gendered power, which still prevailed in America in the era of the American Revolution. A wife's assumption of her husband's tasks contributed to *his* independence, rather than to her own autonomy, as was clearly proved by Deborah and Benjamin's married life. Paradoxically, it could, instead, depreciate her traditional role. Deborah had served her spouse well as a deputy husband for over forty years. Her dutiful supervision of his affairs enabled him to sojourn for many years in England. Her determination to perform her work "frugally and diligently," using Benjamin Franklin's most favorite words, had given him opportunity to act politically and socially on the international arena, as well as to indulge in the frivolities of the contemporary high life—against his egalitarian and anti-elitist declarations. Strikingly, even from such a considerable distance, Benjamin evidently remained the head of his household. His long-lasting absence did not diminish his role as authoritative patriarch. Significantly, Deborah Franklin never expected her contribution to the family would give her power or independence. Like Anne Bradstreet, she saw her role as complimentary; her duty was to her husband and family, not to herself. She displayed no desire to have her "own" career or to attain acclaim; rather she hoped, like Anne Bradstreet, that her contributions would be appreciated.

Jennifer Reed Fry, in her essay "'Extraordinary Freedom and Great Humility': A Reinterpretation of Deborah Franklin," offers an alternative interpretation of women during the colonial period: she adds to Deborah's portrait an examination of her political activity, which is frequently disregarded because of the scarcity of documentary evidence. According to Reed Fry's analysis, Mrs. Franklin's political experiences foreshadow the active role women played in the American Revolution and the early Republic period. That role moved far beyond the household and expanded the social space for women's active involvement in politics. The essay addresses this issue, focusing on the considerable political contribution of an elite woman, Deborah Franklin, in the context of the pre-Revolutionary colonial reality. Confident in her abilities, she surrounded herself with many influential acquaintances, among them Deborah Norris, sister of the first speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, Isaac Norris; Joseph Galloway, a delegate to the First Continental

Congress; Dr. Thomas Bond, a founder of the University of Pennsylvania; Susanna Wright, a poet and a celebrity in the contemporary Philadelphia literary circles, and many others. They remained in close contacts, visiting and dining together, which testified to Deborah's growing political role in colonial Philadelphia. Without such a capable, competent, and independent wife, Benjamin's extended absence would not have been economically or politically feasible (168, 180, 184).

Gender, beside race, economic status, age, and religion, was one of the most important categories that determined the American colonial past. It identified and assessed the role and position of women especially in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Puritan America, and it essentially defined their place in a larger history of American females. Admittedly, the eighteenth century American Puritan woman's major contribution was skilled service to her family and the community. She silently recognized her inferior position which translated into her perpetually serving her husband and submitting to his authority. The female social skills, most significantly managing the household, clearly evidenced women's diligence and diverse ways in which they, distinguished by their gender and determined by the informal and unwritten codes, effectively confirmed the authority of men. Accordingly, Deborah Franklin is still approached by historiography mostly through the stereotypes of victimization and domestication. However, through her broad political activity Deborah made a significant contribution to the pre-Revolutionary colonial cause, thus offering an alternative image of an independently minded female with leadership skills, who was almost invisibly entering a male-dominated space of social life tied to the political issues of the day. Herself growing in significance and prestige, she was, at the same time, enabling her celebrated husband to pursue his own career upon his public employment.

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Jacek Gutorow

"That Possible Immunity in Things": Melancholic Interiors and Secret Objects in Henry James's *The Ivory Tower*

Abstract: Henry James's inability to complete *The Ivory Tower* is one of the most regrettable failures in the history of the XX century American literature. This unfinished work might have become James's great American novel: both a personal vision and an interpretation of his native land, its landscapes, its people, even its light and its textures. As it is, *The Ivory Tower* turns out to be an exorcism of the past and an attempt to discover in one's memory something that would give sanction to the present moment. James achieves this by focusing on the novel's objects and interiors and by showing how they evade our interpretive efforts and cognitive pursuits. What remains is the liberating mystery of the ordinary things as they resist the routine of our expectations and preconceptions.

Keywords: Henry James, *The Ivory Tower*, melancholy, the ordinary

Henry James's 1904 trip back to America after twenty-year absence proved a decisive and lasting experience to the novelist. The journey, which lasted almost one year and took him as far as Seattle and San Diego, seems to have become for the writer a symbolic event. James was returning to his birthplace as a great artist, the author of the just published monumental trilogy of novels—*The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*—and virtually the central figure of (soon to be published) *The New York Edition*, a collection of novels and short stories squeezed into twenty three volumes, each one preceded with an impressive critical introduction from James himself. As it turned out later, the American journey informed most of the novelist's subsequent texts. His 1911 collection of short stories, entitled *Finer Grain*, focused almost exclusively on New York; his last important books (*A Small Boy and Others*, 1913, and *Notes of a Son and Brother*, 1914) were nostalgic memoirs of the New England of the 1850s and 1860s; and his final great novel was to have as its subject dramatic and difficult confrontations with America seen after many years of absence. In all of these texts James attempted to cope, psychologically and artistically, with what he noticed and experienced in the New World.

It is in *The American Scene*, published immediately after James's return to England, that we find the writer's first reactions to the places he had known as a young man and had a chance to examine after no less than twenty years. This is one of James's best and most memorable autobiographical texts, fusing personal recollections and critical interventions, tirelessly nuancing the position of the man who revisits the scenes of his childhood and youth. The mood of nostalgia is conspicuous. James meditates on a "single strong savour" informed by a "hundred happy variations" (389, 378), and, rather importantly, notices that "one's supreme relation… [is] one's relation to one's country" (427). His depictions of the New England landscapes are impressive, sometimes pressingly poetic. At the same time there is a strong sense of the unreality of what the novelist experiences, particularly in numerous passages in which James turns to what he calls "ghostly echoes" and the "infinite penetration of retrospect" (399), and which would culminate in the metaphor of the "trap of memory" (512). James's attitude to America was ambivalent, a blend of fascination and terror, both a gratifying recognition and a suppressed fear of one's own past.

The sentiment that James did not conceal and would articulate both in his later short stories and the finished fragments of *The Ivory Tower* was a feeling of disgust with the modern and capitalist aspects of the American society. This is perhaps best expressed in his picturesque, if violent, descriptions of New York. James's vocabulary oscillates between "monstrous," "horrible" and "hateful" (418, 422), and his reaction to such new sights as sky-scrapers or the New York subway was blatantly negative:

> One has the sense that the monster grows and grows, flinging abroad its loose limbs even as some unmannered young giant at his "larks," and that the binding stitches must for ever fly further and faster and draw harder; the future complexity of the web, all under the sky and over the sea, becoming thus that of some colossal set of clockworks, some steel-souled machine-room of brandished arms and hammering fists and opening and closing jaws. (418)

The novelist was equally disapproving of the social fabric of the new America, seeing in it threads of "dispossession" and "individual loneliness" (427, 487). The descriptions are permeated with a strong sense of ambiguity. On one hand, there is a visible enchantment with its continent-wide greatness and the beauty of its innumerable and varied landscapes. On the other hand, there is a sense of the ugliness and barbarism of the new American cities and their inhabitants. Suspended between attraction and repulsion, unable to choose between feelings of personal possession and dispossession, James felt a strong need to turn his complex experiences into a work of fiction, something that would let him see himself reflected in the other, imaginary characters.

We can discern in James's ambiguous stance a likely genealogy of *The Ivory Tower*, his unfinished masterpiece. The novel had a rather uneasy birth and in fact ended in miscarriage. Its first drafts were sketched out in 1910. It was then abandoned for two years. In the fall of 1912 Charles Scribner, James's publisher in America, prompted by Edith Wharton (who suggested that 8 000 dollars be secretly diverted from her royalties to James's bank account), came out with a proposal of publishing the novelist's autobiographies. James Pinker, the writer's agent, responded with an understandable enthusiasm and dutifully added that the Master "was working on a novel of American life" (qtd. in Edel 477). Scribner's answer to this last declaration might serve as model of how to pay compliments to a writer: "As the publishers of your definite edition [*The New York Edition*; J. G.] we want another great novel to balance *The Golden Bowl* and round off the series of books in which you have developed the theory of composition set forth in your prefaces" (qtd. in Edel 477). James was obviously flattered. It seems that he subscribed to the idea of "rounding off" his trilogy by adding a panoramic narrative about Americans in America. It is worth remembering that already at the end of *The Golden Bowl* two of the novel's four main characters—Adam Verver and Charlotte Stant (Verver)—decide to sail to America to start a new life. *The Ivory Tower* may accordingly be treated as a kind of unintended sequel to the story of the Ververs.

The novel was never finished. We know that James was working on it sometime in the first half of 1914 yet the outbreak of the Great War as well as the writer's failing health made it virtually impossible to continue writing on such a grand scale. Of the ten books James planned to write (like in *The Awkward Age*, each book was to be devoted to a different character), only three and the first chapter of the fourth were written. Judging from the existing fragments—written in meandering yet impeccable prose, with long sentences full of splendid comparisons and images—James's scale was indeed grand. One can only agree with Leon Edel when he remarks that "even in the fragment—like some fragment of partially chiseled marble—we can discern the shapes of strong, highly individualized characters" (504). It seems that in its full shape the completed novel would easily yield a comparison with the previous episodes of the trilogy, themselves gigantic novelistic enterprises. Incidentally, it might be argued that James's inability to finish the novel coincided with his growing disbelief in the possibility of creating a contemporary novel under the constraints of nineteenth-century realism that he inherited and helped adjust to the challenges of the new century.[1] This is succinctly expressed in James's authorial comments to *The Ivory Tower* where he

1 See Gutorow (285–287 in particular) for a detailed examination of James's ambivalent stance towards nineteenth-century novelistic realism.

points to the possibility of a story being exhausted by means of its own narrative: "I seem to see already how my action, however tightly packed down, will strain my ten Books, most blessedly, to cracking. This is exactly what I want, the tight packing and the beautiful audible cracking" ("Working Notes" 152). Is it possible that in this roundabout way James unconsciously tried to explain why he could not have brought the story to its close?

Henry James's inability or unwillingness to complete *The Ivory Tower* is one of the most regrettable failures in the history of twentieth-century literature. This unfinished work might have become James's great American novel: both a personal vision and an interpretation of his native land, its landscapes, its people, even its light and its textures. It definitely marked the novelist's return to his beginnings—the Newport of James's reminiscences is conspicuously a remembered, imaginary Newport of his teenage years, not unlike Proust's Combray or Nabokov's Nova Zembla. The nostalgic strain is not dominant, perhaps even suppressed, but it permeates the inner lives of Rosanna Gaw and Graham Fiedler, the novel's two main characters. It is a pity we have only fragments of the work written with such a momentum in the writer's mind and with such impeccable mastery. Judging from James's meticulous "working notes" (added to the main body of the novel) in which meandering motifs are interlocked in decidedly complex trajectories, one can see the amplitude of the novelist's intention. This was going to be a panoramic narrative that would include James's recollections of the past America, his uneasiness about "what America did to individuals" (Edel 502), his abhorrence of the "world of money… the arid world of the American male" (Novick 503), but also remembered pictures of American sunlight and its dazzling vistas.

But not only this, and here I pass on to the main subject of my interpretation. Together with *The Golden Bowl*, *The Ivory Tower* opened up a new perspective in the Jamesian *oeuvre* as it coped with the more and more felt aspects of the physical world: interiors, precious objects, their cool textures and charming symmetries. These in fact provided him with a sense of redemption on the part of America seen after twenty years, the America that he felt was now becoming alien to him. What linked him to the New World was a memory of senses. Read in this way, *The Ivory Tower* turns out to be an exorcism of the past and an attempt to discover in one's memory something that would give sanction to the present moment.

James had always been sensitive to the touch and the feel of some, usually small and elegant, articles—yet treated them in a fleeting fashion, as constituting a rather indifferent background for human dramas. Now he got preoccupied with objects for their own sake. They took on weight and gravity, became central to the story, gained narrative independence. We can feel this shift of emphasis in many passages. There is a significant scene in *The Ivory Tower* when Rosanna and her

father visit a gallery in Dresden and at one moment decide to "wander away from the great things, the famous Madonna, the Correggio, the Paul Veroneses," and see a "small room of little Dutch and other later masters, things that didn't matter… but where the German sunshine of a bright winter day came down through some upper light and played on all the rich little old color and old gilding" (25). As is well known, throughout his life James eulogized Italian masters and defined the art of the novel by referring to the spectacular narratives included in Tintoretto's *The Crucifixion* or Titian's *Ascension*, the paintings where parts, details and points of view were subjected to the grand scheme of the final impression (something he would call the "mighty pictorial fusion" inherent in Tintoretto's painting, *French Writers* 1107). Now, for the first time, the novelist turned to the Dutch masters and seems to have shared their obsession with the material aspect of things and their particular qualities: shapes, outlines, textures.

The world of *The Golden Bowl* and (especially) *The Ivory Tower* is crammed with objects jostling for our attention and it provides us with carefully staged tableaux of innumerable rooms seen as spectacles of chiaroscuro and rich ornaments. In the opening chapters of the latter novel there is an almost oppressive presence of entrances, rooms, walls and other architectural elements which constitute something more than just a scenery for the drama of death and reconciliation. They illuminate and indeed communicate it by their sheer existence and aura so that human passions and acts can hardly be separated from the distinctly marked background. It is particularly well seen in the few important scenes set in and around Mr Betterman's magnificent house, described as a "florid villa, a structure smothered in senseless architectural element" (7). This is where we find Rosanna in the opening paragraphs of the novel, going round the building, looking at the "clean blank windows" that give her an "impression… of showy picture-frames awaiting their subjects" (7), and ignoring the villa's "rather grandly gaping portal" (8). It would be just another description of the place had James not put such an emphasis on detached parts of the house and draw so much of our attention to architectural nuances.

Later on (at the beginning of the second chapter) the building and its interiors are recalled again, this time with an almost hypnotic effect, as they lead Graham Fiedler, who has just arrived from France, to meditate on the disappointingly American character of the objects around him:

> some of [the room's] material terms and items held him as in rapt contemplation; what he had wanted, even to intensity, being that things should prove different, should positively glare with opposition—there would be no fun at all were they only imperfectly like, as that wouldn't in the least mean character. Their character might be if it would in their consistently having none—than which deficiency nothing was more possible; but he should have to decline to

> be charmed by unsuccessful attempts at sorts of expression he had elsewhere known more or less happily achieved. This particular disappointment indeed he was clearly not in for, since what could at once be more interesting than thus to note that the range and scale kept all their parts together, that each object or effect disowned connections…. There was an American way for a room to be a room, a table a table, a chair a chair and a book a book—let alone a picture on a wall a picture, and a cold gush of water in a bath of a hot morning a promise of purification. (46–47)

Two aspects of this passage are worth stressing. For one thing, the looks and quality of the room are set against Graham Fiedler's general mood of melancholy; they also reflect his uncle's austere Americanism. Objects help to disclose one's suppressed feelings and provide a formula for them. The mixture of suppressed emotions and material surfaces brings to mind the paintings of Edward Hopper, a very Jamesian painter who did not hide his admiration for the author of *The Ambassadors*.[2] Like the James of his last novels, Hopper surrounded the material world with the human aura, giving an impression of loneliness as the objects around the characters are just reflections of their moods. James would probably agree with the great painter who claimed in an interview: "the way in which a few objects are arranged on a table, or a curtain billows in the breeze can set the mood and indicate the kind of person who inhabits the room" (qtd. in Levin 219). It may be noted that in the just quoted descriptions of Mr Betterman's villa there are also numerous references to the effects evoked by sunlight cast on the surfaces of walls and objects. One cannot help noticing James's painterly credentials and his attempts to create the atmosphere by means of light or semi-light falling in different angles on objects. These again are mingled with the characters' perceptions and moods. For example, Rosanna's troubled deliberations on her father go hand in hand with her delight for the "fair prospect" of a Newport scene engulfed in the early sunlight, for the "great sea spaces" and the "line of low receding coast that bristled" (8), while Graham Fiedler's nervous anticipation of what his uncle wants to tell him is accompanied by his acute awareness of the "great green shutters" closed against the sun (46). Later on, the figure of Mr. Betterman, propped on pillows, is "lighted in such a way that the clear deepening west seemed to flush toward it, through a wide high window, in the interest of its full effect" (58).

The second striking aspect of the longer passage I have quoted is its tendency to engage in a symbolical interpretation of the place. It may be easily overlooked—after all, Graham's main impression is of the literalness of things: a

2 For Hopper's interest in James and some affinities between the two artists, see Levin 275–280.

table is just a table and a chair is nothing more but a chair. However, at the very end of the fragment we find out that Graham associates a "cold gush of water" with the process of purification. This rather unexpected intrusion of the symbolical order must give the reader a pause and may remind him/her of the strongly symbolic title of the novel. Is it possible, we may ask, that on a certain level this is a story about the tension between the literal weight of the material world and one's inclination to perceive it in a symbolical way, as a kind of code that needs decoding or a letter to be read? In fact, a careful reading of the novel provides us with a definitely positive answer to this question. The more down-to-earth James's descriptions are, the more enigmatic and mysterious they seem, leaving us with a sense that the objects and interiors so meticulously and painstakingly outlined must conceal some extra meaning, a kind of added information that would justify the novelist's nearly obsessive concern with the physical and the material. Thus, the novel's central tendency and its promise would gravitate towards symbolical senses of objects and situations. On the other hand, *The Ivory Tower* poses the question of the validity of our readerly inquisitiveness. Perhaps it is not so much the case of our grasping the novel's symbolical meanings as our reading them into the text? And maybe James, in a typical master stroke of ambiguity, anticipated our expectations and played with them?

To answer these questions, I propose to take a look at the object that stands literally at the center of the world of the novel and constitutes its symbolical axis and main point of reference. The ivory tower referred to in the title of the novel is a kind of small cabinet placed on what is called *bahut*. Here is James's description of the precious thing which later on in the novel contains an unopened letter and thus an unresolved mystery:

> It was a remarkable product of some eastern, probably some Indian, patience, and of some period as well when patience in such cases was at the greatest…. It consisted really of a cabinet, of easily movable size, seated in a circular socket of its own material and equipped with a bowed door, which dividing in the middle, after a minute gold key had been turned, showed a superposition of small drawers that went upwards diminishing in depth…. The high curiosity of the thing was in the fine work required for making and keeping it perfectly circular; an effect arrived at by the fitting together, apparently by tiny golden rivets, of numerous small curved plates of the rare substance, each of these, including those of the two wings of the exquisitely convex door, contributing to the artful, the total rotundity. (82)

That the cabinet described so lovingly by James becomes the story's main symbol is not surprising. As I said, in his earlier novels James betrayed a weakness for beautiful, elegant and glamorous objects which served as pivots of narratives. The two most famous examples, to be found in *The Golden Bowl*, are the bowl and

the pagoda, synonymous in Maggie Verver's mind with the ivory tower, situated in highly telling and strategic contexts of James's last finished novel. A small and fancy article, the cabinet may remind one of the golden bowl rather than the pagoda; however, it is much more like the latter, not least because it is also described as an ivory tower and thus brings to mind the image of a building. Both objects are impressive, smooth and round, giving a sense of a perfectly completed structure which not only does not let itself be absorbed by the external reality but stands in sheer isolation, apart from the world and self-sufficient. James does much to emphasize the sense of foreignness involved in the two strange and monument-like things. He comes up with their oriental genealogies and exotic names. The pagoda makes us think of Japan, while the cabinet is a "product of some eastern, probably Indian, patience" (82). Such allusions are not accidental. Throughout *The Ivory Tower* James weaves together exotic references: Rosanna's parasol resembles a "Burmese palanquin or perhaps even pagoda" (7), her father's domineering stance is compared to a "large cool dusky temple" with mysterious figures of idols (11), and Cissy, Rosanna's friend, looks like a "seated idol, a great Buddha perched up on a shrine" (40). The impression created is that of the presence of some far-away, exotic and unapproachable beauty. This is strengthened by the perfectly circular shape of both the pagoda and the cabinet, which makes them objects of contemplation rather than spaces to be entered—here are works of art and not places for people to live in. One of the most perplexing scenes in *The Golden Bowl* is that of Maggie Verver standing in front of the visionary pagoda, going around it and wondering if she really wants to enter the fairy-tale building:

> She had walked round and round it—that was what she felt; she had carried on her existence in the space left for her circulation, a space that sometimes seemed ample and sometimes narrow; looking up, all the while, at the fair structure that spread itself so amply and rose to high, but never quite making out, as yet, where she might have entered had she wished. She had not wished till now—such was the odd case…. The great decorated surface had remained consistently impenetrable and inscrutable. At present, however, to her considering mind, it was as if she had ceased merely to circle and to scan the elevation, ceased so vaguely, so quite helplessly to stare and wonder: she had caught herself distinctly in the act of pausing, then in that of lingering, and finally in that of stepping unprecedently near. (301)

In *The Ivory Tower* James repeats this motif. Rosanna goes around Mr. Betterman's villa and hesitates before its grand entrance: "she passed round the house instead of applying at the rather grandly gaping portal—which might in all conscience have accommodated her—and, crossing a stretch of lawn to the quarter of the place turned to the sea, rested here again some

minutes" (8). Incidentally, similar reactions are evoked by the cabinet as Graham Fiedler cannot decide whether he wants to resolve the mystery of the letter (125).

James's initial description of the wonderful cabinet is quite realistic. Later on, however, it takes on symbolical significance. It becomes less and less an elegant object as we are being reminded that what we see is not so much a regular item as an ivory tower, an imaginary space of retreat and artistic, or indeed existential, integrity. As both Graham Fiedler and Rosanna Gaw seem to be in search for such an integrity, and as they try to transcend their hereditary ties and discover their real selves by abstracting from the obvious identification with friends and relatives, it is in their presence that the symbolic potential of the cabinet, a "secret of greater weight," as Gray calls it (85), is activated. Or so it seems for the reader who may be dumbfounded by what one of the characters in the novel describes as the "ambiguity" of Graham's and Rosanna's situation (121). In an important scene Vinty Horton, who becomes something of a financial advisor to Graham, refers to the cabinet with a double irony: "It appears to have been your uncle's only treasure…. And it isn't so much too small… for you to get into it yourself, when you want to get rid of us, and draw the doors to. If it's a symbol of any retreat you really have an eye on I much congratulate you; I don't know what I wouldn't give myself for the 'run' of an ivory tower" (119). And, almost in the same breath, and definitely with the same irony, he addresses Rosanna: "the formula of that young lady herself: perched aloft in an ivory tower is what she is, and I'll be hanged if this isn't a hint to you to mount, yourself, into just such another" (119). Horton's ironic understatement points to two important facts—Graham may become a beneficiary of his uncle's fortune and thus remain financially secure until his death, and he also seems attached to Rosanna, a daughter of a rival millionaire and already a rich young woman. The irony somewhat invalidates the mystery of the unread letter and disarms the symbolic meaning of the cabinet. At the same time, though, it sets in motion the very symbolism centered around the precious object.

Its symbolical significance is very much intensified in the two scenes in which Graham handles the letter he receives from his uncle. Very quickly the letter is interpreted by all the characters and the reader alike as the central mystery of the novel. It seems to suggest that what you need when you want to solve all the problems posed by the narrative is just to unseal and read the message. The moments of hiding the letter in one of the cabinet's drawers and taking it out are presented by James as highly dramatic and surprisingly cryptic. Actually, the scenes read as if they were fragments of some pantomime including accurate gestures and careful body movements. What I think should be noted is that the cabinet is as important as the letter—the mystery of the message is set against

the background of the beautiful and silent object which seems to want to communicate something.

In the first scene Gray is holding the letter and standing in front of the cabinet. He realizes that the "shallowest of the drawers would exactly serve for his putting his document to sleep" (83). The drawer is probably so shallow as to be almost two-dimensional and devoid of depth—one could say ironically (after all, the reader finds himself surrounded by many-leveled riddles and distorted mirrors) that there is nothing hidden from view. Gray decides to hide the letter: "he slipped it in, rejoicing in the tight fit of the drawer, carefully making the two divisions of the protective door meet, turning the little gold key in its lock and finally… attaching the key to a small silver ring carried in his pocket" (83). The bizarre clash of the words "sleep" and "slip"—as James describes it, the letter is simultaneously slipped into a drawer and put into sleep—results in a somewhat dream-like and deeply melancholic aspect of the scene. Dreams and letters require interpretation, and the same refers to the whole scene which is presented as if it was a legend or a myth; there is even a gold key on a silver ring.

In the second scene the celebration continues as the letter is to be taken out of the drawer. Gray resembles a priest or a magician standing "before the big *bahut* with both hands raised and resting on the marble top… he stared at the ivory tower without as yet touching it" (120). After a while he "moved his hands, laying them as in finer fondness to either smoothly-plated side of the tall repository, against which a finger or two caressingly rubbed" (120). And after a brief conversation with Horton:

> Gray was now quite detached, occupied only in opening his ivory doors with light fingers and then playing these a little, whether for hesitation or for the intenser pointing of inquiry, up and down the row of drawers so exposed. Against the topmost they then rested a moment—drawing out this one, however, with scant further delay and enabling themselves to feel within and so become possessed of an article contained. It was with this article in his hand that he presently faced about again, turning it over, resting his eyes on it and then raising them to his visitor… 'The distinguished retreat, you see, *has* its tenant.' (121, original emphasis)

This last remark is significant in the context of an earlier dialogue between Gray and Horton who portrays human beings as facades with doors and windows: "you *are* a façade; stretching a mile right and left. How can you not be when I'm walking up and down in front of you?" (115, original emphasis) Actually, in several places in the novel faces are compared to material objects (for example, Davey's face is reminiscent of a map with rivers standing for wrinkles, 17; and the face of the sick Mr Betterman reminds Rosanna an "empty glass that had yet held for years so much strong wine that a faint golden tinge still lingered on

from it," 12). Here it is not huge and round edifices that are being seen from all directions by characters going around them but two-dimensional facades which have only front sides. The scenario remains the same, though. After all, the facades have windows and doors which may be opened to a mystery hidden inside. Like so many mute objects surrounding James's characters, human visages are riddles that are supposed to contain meaning. One needs to interpret them.

All the passages I have quoted so far seem to suggest that *The Ivory Tower* is not only a novel abounding in symbolic objects, gestures and situations, but that its very narrative has a symbolic quality inviting the reader to discover a deeper meaning of the story. Thus, we would have to do with a novel about our attempts to fathom its mysterious contents. It is tempting to equate Gray's interest in the letter and James's detailed descriptions of the cabinet as the repository of the letter with the very act of reading and interpretation. The fact that we have only fragments of the novel strengthens our impression of its secrecy. We may feel for a while like archeologists who try to reconstruct a model of the edifice from its ruins. We would like to see what James's intentions were, and in this we resemble Graham Fiedler as he is standing in front of the cabinet and wants to know the secret of the letter that his uncle has given him.

The point is, however, that he doesn't. Actually, later on in the novel he admits to being repulsed by the letter and we can notice for the first time his ambivalent response to the fact that his uncle expects him to open it. We learn very quickly that Gray is not at all sure if he wants to know its contents. To Horton's question "Do you appeal to me by chance to help you to decide either way?" Gray answers: "I don't think I want to decide." And he adds: "I think I must just *like* to drift" (121, original emphasis). We may interpret the words as a manifestation of Gray's deep melancholy but we may also see in them an attempt to preserve the beauty of things enigmatic and ambiguous, not expressed directly and thus containing a more important message—the message of the ultimate mystery of reality which cannot be decoded and seen through as if they were transparent. Gray's unwillingness to dispel the mystery of his uncle's letter echoes Maggie Verver's unwillingness to enter the visionary pagoda. Both scenes are crucial because they demonstrate how the apparent inability is infused in James's characters with wonder and respect for things in their concreteness and opacity.

The material world, as presented in James in his last great novels, is in fact opaque and resistant to our attempts to penetrate it and get to its bottom. And I think that in the characters of Maggie and Gray James wanted to show us that we can indeed pay respect to the mystery of the world by not weighing it down too heavily with our readings of it. Not everything is interpretable, James seems to say, and provides us with several discreet depictions of objects that are silent and do not answer our curious gazes even if they are intensely looked upon. In

fact, things themselves constitute an important counterpoint to the ever-changing reality of human affairs. There is the external world that cannot be reduced to signs and symbols—impenetrable, incomprehensible, literal, mysterious, immune to any kind of interpretation. This is what Gray perceives early in the novel. Just after his contemplation of Mr Betterman's room where tables are tables and chairs are chairs he has a vision of the "universal cleanness" and a "real revelation" of what he calls in his mind "that possible immunity in things" (47). Like in Hopper's paintings, the objects and surfaces in James's last novels preserve their precious mystery and elude our inquisitive examinations as to what they possibly stand for. They are concrete and hard, and this is why we cannot dismiss them, get rid of them, treat them as stepping-stones to something else. They are sites of immunity against the reader's reductive hermeneutic procedures, making us appreciate James's novelistic art as an art of seeing and giving meaning to the world we live in.

The ivory tower, the central object of the novel, lends itself to all kinds of more or less obvious interpretations and symbolic readings. After all, though, it remains a riddle. Or, rather, it remains just another impressive article in Gray's room. James's irony lies in the fact that we first realize the ordinariness of the object, but then come to see the unexpected mystery of the ordinary. Paradoxically (the novelist seems to say), things in themselves are simply more meaningful and interesting when they resist the routine of our expectations and preconceptions. No wonder, then, that the letter which was supposed to bring a solution to Gray's ambiguous situation, remains unread. Actually, it is put back in its drawer in a scene which might summarize what I would call James's happy infatuation with the material world and the mystery of its being: "He [Gray] turned back with his minor importance to his small open drawer, laid it [the letter] within again and, pushing the drawer to, closed the doors of the cabinet. The act disposed of the letter, but had the air of introducing as definite statement as Horton could have dreamt of" (122).

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Alicja Piechucka

Women and Sculptures: Femininity in Hart Crane's Ekphrastic Poems

Abstract: The article explores two poems by Hart Crane, "Interludium" and "To the Empress Josephine's Statue," both of which are examples of ekphrasis. Inspired by two sculptures of women, Gaston Lachaise's *La Montagne* and Vital Debray's statue of Joséphine de Beauharnais, the poems in question are at once representations of works of art and of femininity. It is as such that they are scrutinized in an analysis which focuses on poetry, the visual arts and femininity. The article deals with Crane's use of ekphrasis as a genre, but also with his reflections on time and space, the domains of poetry and sculpture respectively. It also delves into a number of connections evidenced in "Interludium" and "To the Empress Josephine's Statue": the one between creation and procreation, understood as maternity, and thus between art and femininity, as well as the ones between femininity on the one hand, and nature, mysticism, morality and history on the other.

Key words: ekphrasis, femininity, Hart Crane, American modernist poetry, visual arts

Hart Crane's first biographer, Philip Horton, reminds us that painting and sculpture were vital to the author of *The Bridge*: "Throughout his life art had the power to stimulate him tremendously, even to focus and direct his imagination" (110). The same source also tells us that the poet executed "a few drawings and water colors for his own amusement" and "was exhilarated when some of them won the approval of Gaston Lachaise, the sculptor, whom he so admired" (110). Crane, who had met the French-American artist the previous year, was also one of his sitters, "pos[ing] nude for a drawing by Lachaise" (Fisher 207). In a 1924 letter to his father, the poet wrote: "What pleases me is that so many distinguished people have liked my poems (seen in magazines and mss.) and feel that I am making a real contribution to American literature" (371). Among his "distinguished" admirers was Lachaise.

Regarded as the "greatest American sculptor of his time" (Lachaisefoundation.org), the Parisian-born Lachaise "played a critical role in the birth of American Modernism" (Lachaisefoundation.org). Having fallen in love with Isabel Nagle, an American, Lachaise had left Europe to settle permanently in the United States. Crane and Lachaise shared an interest in the visual arts as well as a passion for poetry, in particular

that of the French symbolists (Fisher 201). Circa 1923–1924, the poet repaid the sculptor's appreciation of his literary achievement by composing an ekphrasis entitled "Interludium," dedicated not to Lachaise himself, but to his famous work *La Montagne* (*The Mountain*). The aim of the present article is to examine "Interludium" as well as "To the Empress Josephine's Statue," another ekphrastic poem by Crane, written some three years later, in terms of how they, on the one hand, exploit the possibilities offered by a genre existing at the intersection of poetry and the visual arts and, on the other, examine the notion of femininity, since both poems deal with sculptures representing women. Moreover, the two levels on which the poems function, that is, the ekphrastic one and the one focusing on femininity, meet, overlap and intermingle, making it hard to disentangle the one from the other. Importantly, it was not until 2006, with Langdon Hammer's edition of Crane's complete poems, that the two ekphrases in question, one of which had appeared in a magazine while the other remained in manuscript, were published in book form. As a result, they have received comparatively little critical attention.

The word *work* used in the preceding paragraph is putative, since it does not in fact denote one particular sculpture by Lachaise, but a series of them, produced over a period of twenty years and collectively entitled *La Montagne* (*The Mountain*). "The first work to bear that title was executed in New York City in 1913, and was not shown for at least four years," Lachaise's monographer Gerald Nordland dutifully notes, adding that "[s]ubsequent versions were cut in fieldstone, 1921, cast in bronze, 1924, and finally worked up to nine feet for cement casting, 1934. The first *Mountain* was worked in clay, cast in plaster in 1913 and ultimately cast in bronze" (113). Therein lies one of the problems Crane's poem poses: which of Lachaise's *Mountain* sculptures does "Interludium" evoke? While we may safely eliminate the 1934 version, executed not just after Crane wrote the poem, but also after he died, the other versions remain more or less likely "suspects." As Hollander observes in what is a general comment on "unidentifiable images" in ekphrases, "since a good many different versions of the piece exist, it is a matter of acute art-historical and biographical detective work to determine exactly which one Crane had seen before writing the poem" (354). Given that none of the poet's principal biographers seems to have undertaken such investigations, it is perhaps advisable to focus on what Lachaise's variations on the same theme have in common.

While, as noted above, Lachaise used various materials to produce subsequent incarnations of his sculpture, it is largely the same form—albeit differing in size and details—that is recreated throughout the *Mountain* series. Contrary to what the title may suggest, the sculptures represent a woman, aptly described by Hollander as "a bulky, maternal female nude" (354). As such, it corresponds to the female type which recurs in Lachaise's *œuvre* and which runs back to Isabel, "his

model, muse and wife" (Fisher 201). "Gaston Lachaise had one God, and it was a woman, his wife, and he put her on a pedestal, both literally and figuratively," the artist Louise Bourgeois observed (Lachaisefoundation.org). Bourgeois's words seem to echo those the sculptor himself addressed to his spouse in one of his innumerable letters to her: "You are the Goddess I am seeking to express in all things" (Lachaisefoundation.org). The one whom Crane fondly referred to as "fat Mme Lachaise" (361) was seen by her husband as "majestic" and, in artistic terms, as "the primary inspiration that awakened [his] vision and the leading influence that has directed [his] forces" (Lachaisefoundation.org). "Throughout my career as an artist," Lachaise added, "I refer to this person by the word 'Woman'" (Lachaisefoundation.org).

The "Woman" depicted in the *Mountain* series has a soft, rounded, curvaceous body. Even in the small-sized versions of the sculpture, she strikes the viewer as monumental. What attracts our attention is not her face, nor her hair, which is given relatively little prominence by the artist, but her large breasts and belly, frontally exposed and somewhat overwhelming. Equally eye-catching are her immense thighs and arms. The massiveness of the woman's upper body stands in sharp contrast to her lower legs. As Nordland points out, "[f]rom tiny feet through slender calves to expanding thighs and enormous torso the mountain rises to its idealized head" (113–114). The overall shape of the sculpture may be described as horizontal, since the woman is presented in a semi-recumbent position, as if she were sprawled out on a settee. Her expansive, voluptuous body brings to mind the mountain evoked in the title of Lachaise's work. Appropriately, the woman is also leaning against a mountainous landscape, which she dominates, contributing to the impression that she is a mythical giantess of sorts. In fact, she seems to be growing out of or—to put it another way—melting into the slopes which surround her, organically united with them. The title of Lachaise's series, slightly misleading at first, turns out to be justified, since, in his vision, the woman becomes the mountain, and the mountain becomes the woman. The sculpture also validates and illustrates the critical claim that "Lachaise's œuvre is dominated by Isabel, his most compelling works sculpted elegies to her body" (Lachaisefoundation.org) and explains why "[t]he eroticism and monumentality of his mature sculpture—evocative of the heroic ambitions of Rodin and devoted to a celebration of the female body—convinced the painter Marsden Hartley that Lachaise was 'a lyric architect of the human form'" (Fisher 201). In the *Mountain* series—as well as in many other sculptures and drawings of women—Lachaise confirms his reputation of an artist credited with "pushing the boundaries of nude figuration with his innovative portrayals of the female body" (Lachaisefoundation.org).

In Nordland's words, the work by Lachaise which Crane, so to speak, turned into poetry "embodies a concept of the reclining woman as an invulnerable abso-

lute, rising from the plain of human experience as a great truth of life" (113–114). Broad though it may sound, the comment is perhaps helpful in explaining why Crane, tormented—like most poets—with the idea of expressing the inexpressible, saw ekphrastic potential in that particular sculpture. The relative shortness of "Interludium" and its hermetic nature, which may be seen as one of the hallmarks of Crane's *œuvre* in general, make the poem worth quoting in its entirety here:

> Thy time is thee to wend
> with languor such as gains
> immensity in gathered grace; the arms
> to spread; the hands to yield their shells
>
> and fostering
> thyself, bestow to thee
> illimitable and unresigned
> (no instinct flattering vainly now)
>
> Thyself
> that heavens climb to measure, thus
> unfurling thee untried,—until
> from sleep forbidden now and wide
> partitions in thee—goes
>
> communicant and speeding new
> the cup again wide from thy throat to spend
> those streams and slopes untenanted thou
> hast known …. And blithe
>
> Madonna, natal to thy yielding
> still subsist I, wondrous as
> from thine open dugs shall still the sun
> again round one more fairest day. (104–105)

Elsewhere I have already argued that Crane tends to inscribe the concept of the temporal into that of femininity (Piechucka 25–39). In the opening stanza of "Interludium," its addressee is similarly associated with time. If, in Lachaise's work, the woman merges with the mountain, in Crane's poem, time and the woman become one. Additionally, the notion of time is combined with that of space, since time is to be "wended," that is traveled. On a purely ekphrastic level, this association also reminds us that sculpture is a spatial, three-dimensional art. The physical aspects of the sculpture evoked in Crane's poem are further emphasized by the use of words such as "languor" and "immensity." Both refer to the pleasant, heavy stillness of the sculptures in the *Mountain* series, whose monumentality does not, paradoxically, preclude gracefulness, which the mention of "gathered grace"

seems to suggest. The poem's title points to something that intervenes, be it time or space. The "interlude" Crane has in mind may be, on the one hand, the gap between the visual medium used by Lachaise and Crane's subsequent attempt to capture it in words. On the other hand, it is possible to read the "interludium" of the title as an allusion to the time which elapses—or will elapse—between the present and some imminent event that the poem's speaker appears to anticipate. Immobile by definition, Lachaise's sculpture is pictured by Crane as being about to move, expand and develop: "the arms" are "to spread," "the hands to yield their shells" and the mountain-woman is capable of "fostering" and being "unfurl[ed]." The notion of—potential or imminent—mobility rounds off the motifs of time and space prominent in the poem, since it exists at the intersection of both. In this way, Crane comments on one of the phenomena central to ekphrasis: the "opposition between the spatiality of graphic art and the temporality of verbal art," between "[t]he *stasis* traditionally identified with visual art" and the idea of motion inherent in "verbal art" (Heffernan 18).

Most of the pronouns used in "Interludium" are second person singular personal pronouns. Furthermore, grammatical forms such as "thee," "thou," "thy" and "thyself" are given prominence in Crane's poem, appearing either in isolation, as in line nine, or at the beginning or end of the line, as in lines one, six and sixteen. Their profusion reinforces the second-person address used in "Interludium," but also—and perhaps more importantly—suggests a certain inclination towards self-reflexiveness, detectable in the phrases "thy time is thee" or "bestow to thee." This tendency, however, indicates not so much self-centredness or even self-containment, since there is "no instinct flattering vainly now," as the "illimitable and unresigned" mountain-woman's unrestricted, procreative power, in which the poet sees perhaps an echo of the creative power with which artists like himself and Lachaise are endowed. It is as if, dormant so far, the woman was about to become active, creating new landscapes and being the incarnation of natural powers, of Mother Nature herself. "[H]eavens climb to measure" the female addressee of the poem, who is now "from sleep forbidden" and in whom "wide / partitions" take place as she becomes the source and starting point of the "communicant and speeding new," of "streams" and "slopes." The fact that Crane chooses the archaic forms of the abovementioned personal pronouns—as well as that of the verb "have" in line seventeen—may be seen as one more instance of the penchant for archaisms which marks his poetry. However, it may also be expressive of the poem's overall design: to present the mountain-woman of Lachaise's sculpture as the embodiment of primeval forces. A return to the perennial is in fact inherent in the very notion of ekphrastic poetry, which by definition sets the "powers of writing itself against those of a much older means of representation" (Heffernan 9).

The use of archaisms is a fitting way of evoking the eternal cycle of nature, but also timelessness—that of the natural world, but also of the divine. It is possible to read the catachrestic and solecistic constructions used in "Interludium" in a similar light. In addition to being typical features of Crane's poetics, they may also be interpreted as symbolic of the difficulty of translating the visual into the verbal, constituting the essence of "[t]he work of poetic conversion" (Heffernan 14) which is ekphrastic poetry and leading to one of the key features of ekphrasis, namely "*representational friction*, which occurs whenever the dynamic pressure of verbal narrative meets the fixed forms of visual representation and acknowledges them as such" (19; original italics). Furthermore, the catachreses and solecisms are perhaps suggestive of a child's linguistic incompetence and of the primeval nature of the mother-child relationship. The woman in "Interludium"—and thus the woman represented by Lachaise in the *Mountain* series as seen by Crane—is Mother Nature, but she is also a mother figure *tout court*. As such, she is vitality personified. It is worth noting that though Gaston and Isabel Lachaise had no children together, the sitter for the *Mountain* series was a mother, having a son from her first marriage. Allusions to giving birth, nurturing children or producing crop are to be found in the poem inspired by Lachaise's sculpture, as several phrases used by Crane indicate: "to *yield* their shells," "*fostering* / thyself," "speeding *new*," "*natal* to thy *yielding*," "from thine open *dugs*" (italics mine). Qualities traditionally associated with maternal love and maternity complete the mother image in "Interludium." The emphasis is thus on the act of giving, on what is "bestow[ed]" and "spen[t]," on communicating, as the somewhat enigmatic use of the word "communicant" indicates, on bountifulness, suggested by words such as "immensity," "illimitable," and the adjective "wide," which recurs twice in the poem, on knowledge ("thou / hast known"), on joy ("unresigned," "blithe"), on generosity and readiness to share.

In addition to embodying nature and life, the woman acquires a religious dimension in Crane's poem. At the beginning of the closing stanza, she is explicitly addressed as "Madonna," thereby combining the maternal with the mystical. The appellation sheds new light on the fact that, immeasurable, she forces "heavens" to "climb." "[U]ntried" and holding the key to "streams and slopes untenanted," the poem's heroine is pure and chaste, like uncharted territories, but also like the Virgin Mary herself. The mention of "wide / partitions in thee" seems to imply a virgin birth: the woman is to divide, multiply, create something out of herself. Even her beauty, free from vanity or narcissism, verges on the mystical. The religious overtones are emphasized by Crane's lexical choices. The adjective "communicant" may be read as "communicating," but may also bring to mind the noun denoting a person who receives Holy Communion. Similarly, "the cup" the adjective "communicant" apparently refers to may be the chalice containing the

wine at Communion. It must also be noted that the word "grace" used in stanza one has a religious meaning in addition to the "bodily" one. In the closing stanza of "Interludium," the speaker reveals his presence by declaring "still subsist I," presenting himself as a son, but also an observer of the cycle of life and natural phenomena the mountain-woman is part of: "from thine open dugs shall still the sun / again round one more fairest day." The word "dugs," associable with the animal world rather than the human one, seems to emphasize the woman-nature connection. The use of the word "again," which sends the reader back to the phrase "the cup again wide" of stanza four, points to the eternal, never-ending character of the cycle as well as to its connotations of completeness and perfection.

In the closing lines of "To the Empress Josephine's Statue," Crane similarly celebrates a woman by virtually deifying her. The poem's eponymous heroine is none other than Joséphine de Beauharnais, née Tascher de La Pagerie, whom her second husband, Napoleon Bonaparte, made empress of France:

> I own it still—that sure deliberation—
> Leave, leave that Caribbean praise to me
> Who claims a devout concentration
> To wage you surely out of memory—
> Your generosity dispose relinquishment and care.
> Thy death be sacred to all those who share
> Love and the breath of faith, momentous bride
> You did not die for conquerors at your side
> Nor for that fruit of mating that is widowed pride (129)

The poem's ending presents Josephine's "death" as "sacred," emphasizing her greatness ("momentous bride") and the values she represents ("Love and the breath of faith"), which inscribe themselves into the ideal of permanence, loyalty, fidelity and endurance suggested by the second of the poem's subtitles: "Image of Constancy."

The first of the abovementioned subtitles consists of one word, denoting the location of the statue to which the ekphrasis is devoted: "Martinique." The Caribbean island is evoked in the first of the two stanzas which make up Crane's poem:

> You, who contain augmented tears, explosions
> Have kissed, caressed the model of the hurricane
> Gathered and made musical in feathered fronds
> The slit eclipse of moon in palm-lit bonds
> Deny me not in this sweet Caribbean dawn
> You, who have looked back to Leda, who have seen the Swan
> In swirling rushes, urged the appointed charge,
> Outdid our spies and hoodwink sputum,
> Now you may compute your lecheries—
> As well as I, but not with her,— (128–129)

"To the Empress Josephine's Statue" opens with images of Caribbean flora and weather, familiar to the poet due to his visits to the Isle of Pines, which is situated off the south coast of Cuba and on which his mother's family had a summer house. The ekphrasis is a direct address to the "you" recurring throughout it, one who has experienced "explosions" and intimately known "the hurricane." "The slit eclipse of moon in palm-lit bonds" is also part of the poem's landscape, though it is not clear whether it is the eclipse or the hurricane that is "[g]athered and made musical in feathered fronds." The connotations of dynamic movement, but also of danger, destruction and disaster have biographical roots: Crane, who himself survived a hurricane on the Isle of Pines in the year which probably saw the poem's composition, conjures the violence and precariousness of Caribbean weather as well as its loveliness and poetic quality. The opening lines seem to address the statue itself, which is in keeping with the title. Standing amid lush vegetation in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique, the monument is apparently immune to the tempestuous tropical weather and even, paradoxically, able to tame it by using erotic ("kissed," "caressed") or artistic means ("made musical").

A much more down-to-earth and prosaic description of the statue and its surroundings is to be found in a modern-day guidebook:

> At the heart of town is La Savane, a broad garden with many palms and mangos; playing fields, walks, and beaches; plus shops and cafes lining its sides. In the middle of this grand square stands a statue of Joséphine, 'Napoleon's little Creole,' made of white marble by Vital Debray. Joséphine poses in a Regency gown and looks towards Les Trois-Ilets, where she was born. The statue was decapitated in 1991, probably because islanders felt she championed slavery. (Colón, Lipsitz Flippin and Marino 398)

The last sentence of the passage *loco citato* references an event which constitutes a real-life epilogue to the vision of apparent indestructibility dominant in Crane's poem. More information on the subject can be found in the prologue to Natasha Barnes's monograph *Cultural Conundrums: Gender, Race, Nation, and the Making of Caribbean Cultural Politics*, intriguingly entitled "Josephine Beheaded." Its opening paragraph revolves around the artwork which proved so inspirational to Crane:

> There is a spectacle in Martinique's gracious Savane park that is hard to miss. The statue honoring one of the island's most famous citizens, Josephine Tascher, the white creole woman who was to become Napoleon's lover, wife, and empress, is defaced in the most curious and creative of ways. Her head is missing; she has been decapitated. But this is no ordinary defacement: the marble head has been cleanly sawed off—an effort that could not have been executed without the help of machinery and more than one pair of willing hands—and red paint has been dripped from her neck and her gown. The defacement is a beheading, a reenactment of the most visible of revolutionary France's punitive and socially

> purifying acts—death by guillotine. The biographical record shows Josephine born of a slaveholding family of declining fortunes, married into the ranks of France's minor aristocracy, and surviving the social chaos of the French Revolution, which sentenced countless members of the ancient régime to the guillotine. In the form of this statue, she received her comeuppance in twentieth-century Martinique, where she met the fate that she narrowly missed a century [*sic*] earlier. (Barnes 1)

As Barnes points out, "Josephine's symbolic disfigurement is an act of retribution for the cumulative shame of the island's colonial history, a history of slavery and dominion from France that is not yet over. Today, Martinique is still a department of France" (2).

Crane, however, is a poet who can hardly be congratulated on his social sensitivity or suspected of political engagement as either man or artist. He is, nevertheless, susceptible to what may be called the mythmaking potential of history. The imperviousness—debatable, as we have seen—of the statue "memorializ[ing] the Josephine of the coronation ceremony made famous by the court painting of Jacques-Louis David" (Barnes 7), its ability to resist, deal with adversity and show courage in the face of it may also be ascribed to the empress herself. Married to one of the greatest rulers and military leaders in history, she experienced first-hand the tumult of historical change and the pressures connected with her status. Crane does, in fact, go on to emphasize the evil, dangers and meanness the statue or Josephine—or perhaps both—were exposed to, since it/she "urged the appointed charge, / Outdid our spies and hoodwink sputum." Similarly, the words "You, who have looked back to Leda, who have seen the Swan" refer to, on the one hand, the timelessness of myth and art, the mythological allusions fitting in with the Empire period's tendency to take inspiration from the ancient world. On the other, they allude to Josephine's fate, determined by the fact that she married "the god of War." Interestingly, the phrase may also suggest the interplay between an artistic representation and its referent, between the image, itself symbolic of constancy, an abstract quality, evoked in the poem's subtitle, and the real person: the statue "look[s] back to Leda," "remembering," that is, commemorating, Josephine, the bride of "the god of War." The interplay between a work of art and its sitter, which may be a source of representational friction as well, since "this sort of friction also occurs when the poet's language registers the difference between the medium of visual representation and its referent" (Heffernan 19), is, in turn, echoed in the interplay between the work of art and its poetic rendering. The latter interplay is central to ekphrasis, which is in fact a case of a representation within a representation or, as Heffernan puts it, a case of "representing representation" (19).

The lines which close the penultimate stanza of "To the Empress Josephine's Statue," "Now you may compute your lecheries— / As well as I, but not with

her,—," are, like so many passages of Crane's poetry, problematic. It is so because the referents of the pronouns "you" and "her" are not clear. Does the speaker address—as is the case in most of the poem—the empress's sculpted representation ("you"), opposing it to the real Josephine ("her")? Tempting as it may seem, since it would again encourage an analysis of the interplay and discrepancies between the object and its representation, which exist in any art but are, so to speak, doubled in ekphrastic poetry, it appears unlikely. The word "lecheries" seems incompatible with the "[i]mage of Constancy" projected throughout the poem and therefore with the noble values ascribed to the empress and, by extension, to her statue. The interpretation is further complicated by the fact—seemingly ignored by Crane—that Josephine's loyalty to her second husband is questionable. As one biographical entry reminds us, "Joséphine was an indifferent wife, declining to answer the future emperor's passionate love letters and, while he was campaigning in Egypt in 1798–99, flirting with another army officer in a most compromising manner" ("Joséphine," par. 3). On the other hand, Josephine could also be a respectable and supportive spouse, which makes it difficult to unequivocally judge her conduct: "[d]uring the Consulate (1799–1804) she was careful to cause no more scandals and used her social position to advance her husband's political fortunes" ("Joséphine," par. 3). Interestingly, the word "lecheries" denotes—according to some lexicographers, at least—men's improper sexually charged behavior towards women. This, in turn, would suggest that the American poet sees Josephine as the victim of unsolicited sexual advances, a reading of the lines in question which the phrase "but not with her" may confirm. Does the speaker change the addressee for a while, switching from Napoleon's bride to some vague "others," those who threatened the empress or the statue, or both, sexual predators and political enemies?

If we return to the poem's opening lines and the erotic connotations of kisses and caresses, the "lecheries" are perhaps to be associated with the statue's ability to "seduce" and thus tame the natural powers, a strategy which must have been used by the real Josephine, empowered by her femininity, in order to incapacitate her opponents. An accomplished temptress, at once exotic and sophisticated, she was frequently accused of promiscuity (Barnes 3–4). It is, however, worth noting that the numerous relationships which tarnished Josephine's reputation were often motivated not so much by a debauched, libertine nature as by economic necessity, since her irresponsible first husband failed to provide for his young family, and then by a desire to escape the fate of thousands of French noblemen and noblewomen executed during the Revolution (3). In fact, her contemporaries saw her attitude to men and love affairs as unsentimental and pragmatic rather than marked by genuine ardor (10). It must also be remembered that Napoleon had his fair share of extramarital affairs, the Polish aristocrat

Maria Walewska and the French bourgeoise Eléonore Denuelle de La Plaigne, both mothers of the emperor's illegitimate sons, being merely two names on a long list of mistresses. In light of the above considerations, it could be concluded that when Crane gives prominence to fidelity and loyalty in "To the Empress Josephine's Statue," he does so at the expense of historical data, but in accordance with a romantic legend he visibly wishes to uphold, best expressed perhaps by the words Napoleon famously uttered on his deathbed: "France, the Army, head of the Army, Josephine." The statue's physical resistance, emphasized in Crane's ekphrasis, mirrors the qualities which the poet chooses to ascribe to the French empress and which inscribe themselves into the general belief that Josephine was the love of Napoleon's life.

As mentioned earlier in this article, Josephine is presented as a deity towards the end of Crane's poem. It is this godlike, unnamed force, associable with the empress, her statue, or both, that the speaker implores in the stanza in question. The plea, "Leave, leave that Caribbean praise to me," may be read as metaliterary, the "Caribbean praise" being perhaps the poem itself. As if to confirm his right to such exclusivity, the poet-speaker asserts in the preceding line, "I own it still—that sure deliberation—." He thereby refers to his examination of the statue and the reflection prompted by it: after all, as Heffernan reminds us, "Michael Baxendall notes that ekphrasis tends to represent not so much a picture as 'thought after seeing a picture' " (25); it is also often a reflection "on the complexities of representation itself" (20). The line is perhaps also an allusion to the slowness, immobility and majesty inherent in the sculpture. The two lines which follow are somewhat cryptic again, "Who claims a devout concentration / To wage you surely out of memory—." As the relative pronoun and, in consequence, the relative clause it introduces seem to refer to the personal pronoun "me" at the end of the previous line, it can be speculated that the speaker needs to make a lot of effort to erase both the statue and its sitter from his mind. It may also be suggestive of the concentration which is necessary to contemplate this and, for that matter, any work of art. The speaker may be self-critical when he deals with memory, with the inevitability of his forgetting what he wishes to remember: art—be it sculpture or literature—would then be a desperate means of opposing the inexorable passage of time and the havoc wreaked by oblivion.

The last five lines of Crane's poem appear to be addressed to the empress herself rather than to her statue. Since "[t]hy death" is mentioned, it is unlikely that the speaker refers to a sculpture unless what he means by "death" is the statue's destruction. However, the poem's opening lines suggest the statue's indestructibility, and thus, by extension, the permanence of all works of art. The poem's final two lines seem to sum up the empress's fate: "You did not die for conquerors at your side / Nor for that fruit of mating that is widowed pride." The two statements

possibly allude to the fact that, Napoleon having divorced her, Josephine did not become his widow, and was thus deprived of the "pride" that she could have taken in widowhood. Nor did the emperor of the French become her widower: Josephine "did not die for [the] conqueror[ ] at [her] side." A mother of two children from her previous marriage to the viscount de Beauharnais, the empress did not give Napoleon any offspring, expected to be the "fruit of mating." The American poet's overall suggestion is perhaps that, all in all, Josephine was more loyal to the Corsican than he was to her, leaving her in order to marry another woman who would bear him a son as well as be a political asset for him. The heroine of Crane's poem died abandoned, but somehow victorious for not having compromised the loyalty and faithfulness the author associates her with. The statement, "Your generosity dispose relinquishment and care," is ungrammatical, which is hardly surprising in a work by a poet known for his solecistic tendencies. It is therefore not clear whether "generosity" generates "relinquishment and care"—in which case the letter *s* would be missing in "dispose"—or whether it is the other way round, which would mean the sentence is an example of idiosyncratic inversion, an inverted version of "Relinquishment and care dispose your generosity." It is also possible that the statement contains an implicit imperative of the kind that may be found in Renaissance and Baroque poetry. It would then be read as "[May y]our generosity dispose relinquishment and care," a construction grammatically parallel to the line which follows. Whatever the case might be, all four possible readings imply selflessness, renunciation and affection, which harmonize, on the one hand, with the "[l]ove," loyalty and "faith" Crane's poem celebrates, and, on the other, with the bid to struggle with oblivion, an endeavor inherent in all forms of art.

Interestingly, Hart Crane was not the first to commit his impressions of Josephine's statue to paper. Some four decades before his poem was written, Lafcadio Hearn, the Greek-born Japan-based American *fin-de-siècle* writer, had had the opportunity to view Vital Debray's sculpture during his two-year stint as a foreign correspondent in the West Indies. The written account of what may, without exaggeration, be called Hearn's encounter with the French empress betrays his fascination with both the woman and her marble representation:

> I went to look at the white dream of her there, a creation of master-sculptors… It seemed to me absolutely lovely.
>
> Sea winds have bitten it; tropical rains have streaked it: some microscopic growth has darkened the exquisite hollow of the throat. And yet such is the human charm of the figure that you almost fancy you are gazing at a living presence…. Perhaps the profile is less artistically real,—statuesque to the point of betraying the chisel; but when you look straight up into the sweet creole face,

> you can believe she lives: all the wonderful West Indian charm of the woman is there.
>
> She is standing just in the centre of the Savane, robed in the fashion of the First Empire, with gracious arms and shoulders bare: one hand leans on a medallion bearing the eagle profile of Napoleon.… Seven tall palms stand in a circle around her, lifting their comely heads into the blue glory of the tropical day. Within their enchanted circle you feel that you tread holy ground,—the sacred soil of artist and poet;—here the recollections of memoir-writers vanish away; the gossip of history so hushed for you; you no longer care to know how rumor has it that she spoke or smiled or wept: only the bewitchment of her lives under the thin, soft, swaying shadows of those feminine palms.… Over violet light, she is looking back to the place of her birth, back to beautiful, drowsy Trois-Islets,—and always with the same half-dreaming, half-plaintive smile,—unutterably touching. (qtd. in Barnes 8–9)

Not only were Hearn and Crane similarly captivated by the most famous statue in Fort-de-France, but their literary renderings of it reveal affinities which almost make one wonder whether the latter happened to have read the former's text. Hearn's depiction shows he was under the spell of both the artwork and the beauty of the person who had inspired it. Unlike Crane, Hearn was heterosexual and thus even more susceptible to the erotic aura surrounding Josephine and projected onto her statue. For Hearn and Crane alike, the power of art and that of femininity merge in Debray's work. The exotic flora and sultry climate of Martinique only add interest to the sculpture and the Martinique-born woman it represents. The fact that the statue is surrounded by luxuriant vegetation gives prominence to the connection between womanhood and nature. The particular geographical location of the monument results in it being exposed to the elements, which, however, reveal their powerlessness vis-à-vis the marble beauty. The power of femininity is magnified by the epic power of history: the fact that Josephine was Napoleon's spouse and thus basked in his military glory—albeit only reflected—is important to both Hearn and Crane. For both of them too, Josephine's statue acquires an almost mystical dimension, but only insofar as it is artistically useful and inspirational. Art is akin to, but ultimately superior to any religion, including an idiosyncratic, semi-pagan cult of a beautiful, spellbinding woman marked by History with a capital H. The superiority of art and artistic freedom is also what precludes any enslavement to facts, biographical and historical. Both Hearn's prose text and Crane's poem create the impression that the authors interact with a living, breathing human being, that the medieval terms for sculptors and sculpture, "masters of the living stone" and "the literature of the illiterate," respectively, are more than poetic phrases. This seeming ability to breathe life into stone encourages reflection on the interaction between the real and the artificial, which in turn engenders reflection on the link between literature and the visual

arts, crucial to all ekphrastic writing. It must be remembered that, in addition to representational friction, a key characteristic of much ekphrastic writing is "*prosopopoeia*, the dramatic personification or more precisely the *envoicing* of a mute, inanimate object" (Heffernan 22). Finally, both Hearn and Crane appear to suggest that art, like love, femininity and sexual attraction, is largely the domain of the intangible and the irrational.

In Heffernan's words, to analyze ancient and medieval ekphrastic poetry is to "see how the word comes to master the painted or sculpted image it represents, and at the same time how the power of this image-mastering word serves to reinforce an authority that is essentially male" (10). In the case of the two ekphrases discussed in the present article as well as Hearn's prose depiction of Josephine's statue, the author of the literary text is a man, as are the authors of the two sculptures behind the ekphrastic texts in question. The male gaze is thus multiplied and magnified, its object being invariably women: Isabel Lachaise and Josephine Bonaparte, the mountain-woman and the French empress, respectively. The two Crane poems, coupled with the Hearn passage, celebrate womanhood, doing so in more than purely aesthetic terms. The gaze fixed by the writers on the two sculptures—and by the sculptors on the sitters—may be male, but it does not necessarily "reinforce an authority." Instead, we have male viewers—sons, lovers, admirers and, above all, artists—looking not just at images of femininity, but at femininity itself, pondering its essence and delving into its arcana. Woman emerges from this act of looking, depicting, thinking and transcribing as an ultimate force and an absolute. In her meet maternal love and erotic passion, the natural and the mystical, moral values and artistic inspiration, the greatness and transience of human history and the timelessness of art. Throughout the centuries, men may have exercised their authority over women and made them feel and appear inferior, but have also been aware that women will always be superior to them in one respect: the ability to give birth. The only men endeavoring to usurp the female gift of procreation—and thus, in a sense, "feminizing" themselves—are artists, involved in a constant battle with themselves, their medium and the world in which they live, which they represent or respond to in their art—and which ultimately responds to them and their art—as well as a battle, or rivalry, with other artists. It must be remembered that not only do the authors of ekphrasis, like its father, Homer, find themselves "aiming to rival the very art [painting or sculpture] [t]he[y] ostensibly salute" (16), but they also enter "a contest stayed not just between the word and the image but also between one poet and another" (23). Arguably, in few literary genres are the artist's tensions and dilemmas as conspicuous as they are in ekphrasis.

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Kacper Bartczak

The Poetics of Plenitude and the Poet's Biography: Self-Creation in Some Later Poems by John Ashbery

Abstract: The article deals with the status of biographical references in John Ashbery's later poetry. It is an attempt to work out an approach that, while keeping the biographical in view, is an alternative to the way in which the biographical has functioned in recent Ashbery scholarship. In discussing Ashbery's strategy, I use the neo-pragmatist idea of aesthetic self-creation, especially a version of it developed by Alexander Nehamas in his writings on aesthetic objects. The term I am developing to discuss the variety of self-creation in Ashbery is "the emerging self," and I see it as a component of a poetics which I am calling the pragmatist ironist poetics of plenitude. The emerging self of the poetics of plenitude, rising over the expanse of a lifetime of poetry writing, is a type of poetic authorial subjectivity whose relation to the empirical facts of the author's biography reverses the relation between poetry and biography found in confessional poetry. The poetics of plenitude shows the biographical fact to be dependent on the poetic element on which it relies for its authenticity. Within the poetics of plenitude, it is the poetic that is the real and authentic.

Key words: John Ashbery, poetry and biography, pragmatist poetics

John Ashbery, one of the most influential poets of more than the past half-century in English, used to be thought of as a self-less poet. No self or subject, authorial, biographical, lyrical, or other, speaks through this rich linguistic flow, the flow itself being its own simulated speaker, detached and autonomous from the life of the poet—such used to be the main critical formula applied to Ashbery. However, significant recent approaches to his writing have been revising this formula, pointing to mechanisms which reveal more recognizable subjective structures, and leading, in turn, to the renewed question of how personal experience and autobiography function in this poetry.

The discourse on the place of biography in Ashbery's poetry remains fresh. In this article, I am going to inquire into one possible mode in which this poetry proposes to make biography available again, without falling back on the aesthetically and philosophically irrelevant notion of the autonomous expressive subject.

Tracing a type of textual subjectivity that I am going to refer to as the "emerging self," I will discuss its relations to the actual biography of the empirical author of the poems. In doing this, I will hope to modulate and complement some more recent critical commentary on the role of biography in Ashbery. Finally, I will also attempt to show how my idea of the "emergent self" in Ashbery is part of a poetics which I am elsewhere calling "the poetics of plenitude."[1]

I am proposing a critical hunt, a search for an ephemeral textual being called "the emergent self." But the hunt is only possible within a larger poetic environment of the "poetics of plenitude." Such poetics makes a bold claim of the precedence and priority—epistemological, psychological, and temporal—of the poem over the "facts" of the empirical life. However, as we shall see, this bold claim is made not against these facts but in their interest.

The Self-less and Biography-less Ashbery

It is worth remembering, amidst all the fluctuations of Ashbery's critical reception, that his poetry rose to wider public attention, and later acclaim, through a narrative that clearly stressed the shaping of a strong poetic subjectivity through a lifetime of poetry writing: Harold Bloom's notorious theory of "the anxiety of influence." In the light of Bloom's dark gnostic divagations, there is a subjective self, stealthily rising in a poet like Ashbery, through a cunning series of evasive, half-worshipful, half-aggressive stances of opposition toward the poetic predecessors. When successfully evolved, this subject invades and appropriates the imaginative figures forwarded across time by the proud predecessor. This subject becomes its own proud predecessor.

But such posturing—too Romantic, too irrational for the contemporary academic climates—has been too much for scholarship. Contrary to Bloom's narrative, later poetic and critical responses to Ashbery, influenced by the post-structuralist critique, have been much more suspicious of attempts to trace forms of subjectivity in his poems. This also led to dropping the biographical subject from view almost entirely. David Lehman could write *The Last Avant-Garde* as a biography of a

1 This article is part of a larger project whose aim is to move toward a definition of a pragmatist poetics which I am calling the "poetics of plenitude." I am developing this term over a series of articles some of which have already seen print, while others are to be published this year. For a definition of the poetics of plenitude identified and described with reference to Wallace Stevens, see my "Wallace Stevens's Pragmatist Poetics of Plenitude." An essay on Richard Rorty's concept of irony and its significance for the poetics of plenitude is scheduled to be published by a philosophical journal, *Contemporary Pragmatism*, this year.

poetic movement, but he could not write biographically about Ashbery's poetry, since "Ashbery is certainly the least autobiographical of modern poets. No one's poems have less to do with the details of his life" (94). David Herd, the author of a comprehensive study of Ashbery's poetry, has maintained this approach, arguing that although references to biographical facts found in his *oeuvre* can sometimes serve as points of entry, they will not help to shed any explanatory light. They "do not, on the whole, enable one to read it" (20).

Other approaches made it even more clear that the demise of the subjective in Ashbery is particularly well detectable when we consider the evacuation of the biographical self from Ashbery's writing. These critiques saw ways in which the poet simply blocks access to his biography. Antoine Cazé, for example, discussed Ashbery's strategies of evading autobiography and the attendant dissolution of biographical subjectivity in his poems. He described the poet's dense linguistic play of inviting autobiographical references only to thwart the formation of any coherent subject as a kind of "critical lyricism," that is "a conflict-ridden mode of personal expression in which self-distancing strategies ensure a rhetorical dislocation of the autobiographical subject." A similar approach was taken by David LeHardy Sweet, whose discussion of Ashbery's use of painting techniques highlighted gestures aiming at the erasure of any subject-oriented stances (231–74).

This wave of Ashbery's reception as regards the role of biography in his poetry was greatly boosted by two factors: the aesthetic climate of the New York School poetic avant-garde, and the general post-structuralist intellectual air that was inimical to the idea of formulating stable subjectivities in language. The "New York school of poetry" is a rather unhappy and pretentious term in itself, ignoring vast differences between what was mostly a coterie of friends and artists, but if there is a common denominator uniting the writers it would be their pronounced animosity towards the styles of poetry generally described as "confessional." Whatever Ashbery shared with O'Hara in the lesson they took from the painters must have revolved around the idea that if the personal experience enters the medium of the artistic, it does so under a strict regime of ploys, in a formal climate which effectively eliminates the direct flaunting of the personal, especially the personal that expresses deep psychological drama. Ashbery himself spoke repeatedly of his wish to present general versions of common human experience, evoking circumstances that are transferrable from one particular life to another. His own comparison of his poetic method to manufacturing one-size-fits-all socks—which, as Ashbery says in an interview, is his own version of a confessional poem—is among the most popular critical references (Murphy 25).

Additionally, the readings of Ashbery by those commentators who, like Cazé and LeHardy Sweet, focus on blocking or erasing the biographical layer, are backed by a very specific nexus of theoretical argument—the post-structuralist and de-

constructive onslaught on the chances for maintaining any more stable authorial subjectivity in the literary text. Seán Burke has pointed out one paradoxical result of the combined post-structuralist attack on the notion of the author offered by Foucault and Barthes (101–11). Grounded in the earlier theoretical attack on the philosophical subject as an autonomous entity, their argument aimed to liberate texts from the limiting institution of "the author" as a source of transcendental authority on the meanings of the text. However, according to Burke, such a critique led to "affirm[ing] the counter-ideal of impersonality" (105). No wonder that, when applied to advanced forms of postmodern literature, this line of thought has made it unlikely to consider biography as a viable context for the discussion of a work, and Ashbery's writing is a poignant case in point.

The Return of the Biographical in Ashbery

And yet, with a change in the intellectual climate, the biographical seems to have been surfacing in Ashbery's complex poetics, and the recent decade has seen a return of more biographically poised readings of the poet. These have been enabled by a shift in the theoretical discourse on subjectivity. Various backgrounds and philosophical platforms have outgrown the strict ban on the forming of subjectivity in linguistic literary output, pointing instead to flexible, playful, complex, dynamic, non-confessional and non-expressive subjectivities found in forms of self-irony or self-awareness in contemporary poetry. These subjectivities seem much more independent of personal expression and the facts of biographies than it is the case in any modes that could be called "confessional." One notable example in this respect can be found in Charles Altieri's discussion of Ashbery's "A Wave" as a display of post-modern self-awareness, in which subjectivity resides in a series of internal reflections on multiple, context dependent self-identifications.

An important example of the continuation of the critical path cleared by Altieri is John Emil Vincent's study of Ashbery's later poetry entitled *John Ashbery and You*. It seems that Altieri's treatment of Ashbery's opaque verse as a field that tests alternative self-reflexive stances has allowed Vincent to bring the biographical back and to show Ashbery as a poet writing from within quite specific autobiographical and cultural contexts. These contexts, according to Vincent, provide materials within which Ashbery may put in motion an interpersonal, reader-involving play, which will not result in writing about a specific life, but which will produce involving reports from specific cultural moments. Here, the autobiographical "simply means something entirely different": it is present, but in ways that are different from those uses of autobiography that make it a case

of transparency (20). Rather, in a critical fashion reminiscent of Altieri, Vincent argues that Ashbery's craft is a means of offering "strategies or collections rather than shapes or, say, authorial personality" (20). The poet is present in his poems, but only as a figure "suspended in the solution of poetry and thus is only available when one is suspended in that solution oneself" (22).

Another intellectual platform that has enabled a different take on the biographical layer of Ashbery's poetry has been pragmatism. In his extended study of friendship patterns amidst the New York poets, called *Beautiful Enemies,* Andrew Epstein has reached to Emersonian pragmatism to find the central aesthetic imperative of Ashbery in the impulse pushing the self toward a series of continuous fluid transformations, never allowing it to cling to any formulated stage. This imperative shows in the various tensions constantly present in the poet's friendships, the tensions which are variously reflected in the poems. Friendship becomes an important field of aesthetic and intellectual challenge and it is this thematic that drives Epstein's presentation of Ashbery's poetry. The Emersonian pragmatism that Epstein detects in Ashbery makes friendship both a crucial and a problematic fuel for poetry: "any friendship… must remain… merely a starting point, a spur, for one's own incessant transformations" (71). The poem becomes witness to such tensions, and Ashbery's poetry can be read as an "indirectly autobiographical narrative" (148) on a self that looks for difficult balances between allegiances of friendship and the internal transformative drive that it needs to heed against the danger of reification.

And yet, what remains to be understood is how the more fluid, transitional subjectivities enabled by such discourses affect the biographical. What exactly is the status of the empirical biographical fact in Ashbery? Even more importantly, what is the precise difference between such strategies and the confessional mode? Isn't Ashbery, by any chance, merely a more sophisticated confessional poet who must reach back and find aesthetically modulated access to an experiential platform, a platform always prior to the poem? And how stable, how "personal" or "real," are the ephemeral subjectivities whose birth is sensed in Vincent's and Epstein's critical narrative? If we are now ready to talk of forms of agency in Ashbery, as both Vincent and Epstein suggest, how should we portion out the biographical from the text of poetry within the activity of this agency? Vincent and Epstein's approaches do not seem to say enough of the intense exchanges and achieved balances which emerge in Ashbery between these areas.

To answer such questions, we need to inquire into a crucial difference that Ashbery's poetry introduces into the "ontology" of any given present moment in the life of a poet like himself, and to show how this "ontology" is different from the one presupposed by the confessional poem. In a normal confessional poem, the central problem is finding an aesthetic distance toward an empirical fact,

without obliterating its authenticity, while the fact must be thought of as prior to its poetic realization.[2] It is my contention that Ashbery's emergent self, as a creature of the poetics of plenitude, alters our understanding of this relation and thus has a huge impact on our understanding of what it means, for a poet, to have a biography.

Ashbery and the "Emergent Self" of the "Poetics of Plenitude"

In what follows, I will try to signal the presence of forms of more dynamic, evolved subjectivity in Ashbery's later volumes, by analyzing their relation to the biographical layer. Delineating the emergence and activity of poetic subjectivity in Ashbery's writing, I will use the term "self-creation." Self-creation as a result of reading, writing, or other forms of artistic participation is a recurrent motif in neo-pragmatist aesthetic theory, notably in the works of such philosophers as Richard Rorty. Here, however, I will limit myself to referring, later in the essay, to the work of Alexander Nehamas. Nehamas's ideas expand and develop the concept of the aesthetics of self-creation found in Rorty, supplying it with more detail and helping us see how the term "self-creation" may be applied usefully to Ashebry's text.

Without insisting on Nehamas's ties to neo-pragmatism, or exploring the differences between his stance and Rorty's, I am going to refer to his special understanding of "self-creation," in which this disputed notion receives a new formula, allowing us to surpass the post-modern idea of the death of the authorial subjectivity in literature. By referring to Nehamas's careful explorations of the writing and interpretive acts, with their consequences for subjectivity, I will trace a form of evanescent authorial subjectivity in Ashbery, related to the procession of the poems themselves, a subjectivity I am going to call "the emerging self of poetic plenitude." As I will argue, this self seeks its authentic reality in a way that makes it differ from the authenticity of the expressive subject of consciousness—the cornerstone of the confessional model. As we will also see, this form

2 I am far from following a common misconception according to which a confessional poem is a simple report from personal experience. Adam Kirsch is right when he argues, in reference to these poets, that their "verbal equivalent" of experience—a term borrowed from Eliot—"is not a record, transcript, or confession" (xv). With all the artfulness, however, with which such poets as Lowell or Bishop attended to their experience, they do not move beyond the model in which poetry is a *return* to *prior* experience. The consequence of this ontological priority of experience over poetry is that poetry becomes a search for accurate formal distance to what has always already been lived through. The poetics of plenitude is a more radical proposition of the relation between poetry and biography.

of subjectivity affords a paradoxical return to the biographical element—a return, however, which offers a radical reworking of the confessional model. In Ashbery's poetics, it is the biographical "facts" which begin to depend on the poems for their reality, and not *vice versa*.

My first task is to discuss the emergence of a dynamic, fluid, poetic agency, much indebted to the creative practice itself, which I sense to be informing some of the more poignant poems of Ashbery's later phase. In these poems the dislocations of autobiography continue as attention is shifted from the flatness of autobiographical facts to the progress of the poem itself, its finding itself amidst its own contingent passage, and, eventually, to the affirming declarations of the creative pleasure of its coming into being. In other words, the writing process becomes a platform for a form of agency that I will refer to as the *emergent* self, or the *questing* self. This self is a textual entity, an agent we need to posit behind the linguistic and aesthetic gestures made by the poem. When conceived of as an action, the tensions, shifts, and disjunctions which constitute Ashbery's poetics begin to imply an agent behind them. This agent, or poetic self, is different from any psychologized internal drama. Within the approach I am proposing, the erasure of the autobiographical author signals the birth of a different authorial entity which, although distanced from (auto)biography, is also a more stable factor influencing the empirical biography of the poet than it has been suggested by critics like Vincent and Epstein, even though it seems to have no abode beyond the process of composition. Its stability, as we will see, is in its task. And the task is not to reflect biography but to sustain the possibility of its authentic reality.

A fitting starting point for detecting the presence of this form of subjectivity can be found in a poem from the volume *Your Name Here,* entitled "Life Is A Dream." It opens with what will by now appear as a standard Ashbery denial of any sense of identity that might be variously co-opted by external forces. The speaker of the poem declares: "A talent for self-realization / will get you only as far as the vacant lot / next to the lumber yard, where they have rollcall" (*Your Name* 59). "Your name here," the phrase used in the title of the volume, is borrowed from the world of bureaucratic identifications of human subjects. The phrase evokes the language of rubric-bound categorization, of procedures of identification for the purposes of generating data, their storage and management. Such forms of identification lead to emptiness and vacancy, becoming a standardized paper fiction. If the task of such identification procedures is to establish a stable reality, the calculable availability of hard data has a reverse effect. Ashbery's version of realism finds such a degree of measurability to be pernicious. The fiction of self-realization that is mentioned at the start of the poem is precisely such a construct created and fed by the bureaucratic apparatus. In a world defined by bureaucratic categorizations, the notions of "identity" or "self-realization" are tools

of control. Thus, when Ashbery says that the talent for self-realization will only result in vacuity, I take this "self-realization" to refer to the sad complicity of our biographies with the hard data our empirical being produces.

As this type of self-realization is refuted in the poem, it soon gives way to a different stance. The poem ends with an ambiguous and disturbing image of hand-shaking: "This gloved hand, / For instance, that glides / so securely into mine, as though it intends to stay" (*Your Name* 59). This image brings to mind the act of introduction. Sadly, since the hand is gloved, the gesture is double-edged: it promises openness, perhaps friendship or intimacy, but simultaneously blocks these forms of contact and communication. Moreover, the participants of the situation remain mysterious: the owner of the gloved hand is absent. Yet, amidst such distance and ambiguity, the image does evoke the speaker's own hand ("glades… into mine"), which may make readers think of the poet's own act—the writing of the poem—and the way in which the poet is present in it. Of course, the gloved hand locked into the poet's own hand is Ashbery's always mysterious *you*: a reader, listener, or the speaker's own projection of an interlocutor, a fiction of a conversation partner, remaining mysterious, even slightly menacing. Critical commentary has stressed how in Ashbery the "you" pronoun is a firm signal of including the reader's presence in the poem. Bonnie Costello has discussed the multiple functions performed by Ashbery's fluid "you's," pointing out that "at least one very concrete reification of 'you' is an actual reader" (495). John Emil Vincent agrees with Costello that Ashbery's use of the pronoun "offer[s his] reader a place to enter his poetry" (161), and structures the discussion around the idea of the "you" signifying a conversational partner not just of a single poem but of the entire volume, which, as Vincent compellingly argues, becomes the primary unit of Ashbery's *poesis* at some point. But my contention here is that the evasiveness with which the "you" haunts certain poems also signal the hidden "I" of the act of inclusion.

Ashbery's offer is complex: his shielded greetings, while welcoming a "you," bring echoes of a distant "I." The "you" does not signal a pure presence of the other and points in the direction of Ashbery's ironic internal monologue. Thus, if the "gloved hand" introduces any sort of reference to a "you," it automatically, if ironically and unexpectedly, reintroduces self-reference, a vague aura of an "I," which, though apparently fictitious, nourishes the poem as its basic reality. This aura is, however, inseparable from the passage of the poem, since its mysterious presence is ushered in with the image of the poet's hand, the hand that readers may associate with the act of writing. With the dismissal of standard autobiography as a viable platform for the reality of the speaker, such a source is now sought exclusively in the poems themselves, in their contingent, unexpected passage.

A similar development—from the flatness of autobiography as common cliché to some other, more bizarre identifications—occurs in a poem entitled "The Problem of Anxiety" found in the volume *Can You Hear Bird*:

> Fifty years have passed
> since I started living in those dark towns
> I was telling you about.
> Well, not much has changed. I still can't figure out
> how to get from the post office to the swings in the park.
> Apple trees blossom in the cold, not from conviction,
> and my hair is the color of dandelion fluff. (121)

This flat, mixed, cliché-ridden, and highly uncertain fragment is then, at the opening of the next stanza, confronted with a blunt question:

> Suppose this poem were about you—would *you*
> put in the things I've carefully left out:
> descriptions of pain, and sex, and how shiftily
> people behave toward each other? Naw, that's
> in some book, it seems. (121)

The question that opens this stanza works in two ways. First, it confronts the reader with the possibility that the previous stanza, with its mixture of cliché and bizarre lyricism, might, in fact, be about the "me" of the poem. "What if the previous sentences were about me," is, I suggest, the implied question here. Again, and perhaps more clearly than in the previous example, we have to do with the fluidity of Ashbery's "you," which is active enough to make the pronoun point in the direction of the "I" of the poem.

With such strategies, the poem interrogates our worn-out self-identifying reports, and finds them unsatisfactory. These attempt to say too much and end up saying nothing, in the sense that they merge back into the predictable. Is the inclusion of the gritty existential detail—pain, sex, disappointment, etc.—of any use? The answer follows immediately: "Naw, that's / all in some book, it seems." The gritty detail is a cliché itself, much abused by the surrounding culture, awash with exhibitionism and sensationalism. The restoration of the erased material would be of no help. Indeed, it would devalue the experience itself, turning it over to the treadmill of worn-out tropes. Does this mean that the poet blocks them because he craves originality? No doubt, although not for the self of autobiography, but for the poem. And so the poem takes another turn away from cliché, towards "collectibles," the aesthetic of the bizarre that Ashbery has often praised in the works of Raymond Roussel or Joseph Cornell:

> For you
> I have saved the descriptions of chicken sandwiches,
> and the glass eye that stares at me in amazement
> from the bronzed mantel, and will never be appeased. (*Bird* 121)

This is Ashbery's variety of surrealism: we move from the American quotidian—a chicken sandwich—to a gathering of objects which are suggestive of much less realistic climes. And yet, the collection is not totally accidental. One object in particular should make us pause: "the glass eye," gratuitous as it may seem, does bring with it a plethora of references. First, in a familiar ploy, the word "eye" puns, of course, on the word "I." Secondly, the object itself, being glass and round, recalls another round and glass object, one that brought Ashbery fame and recognition: Parmigianino's convex self-portrait. And finally, the eye, which "will never be appeased," suggests constant surveillance and an external gaze which is difficult to avoid. As a token of scrutinizing consciousness, pointed at the speaker, it stands for a source of apprehension. In short, for those who have been following Ashbery's biography, it brings to mind a theoretical and interpretive motif that was another factor responsible for Ashbery's rising to poetic prominence in the 1970s: Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence."

If Ashbery is ironizing a critical apparatus which once brought him into public attention, an apparatus based on a narrative of predictable poetic development, he is also absorbing it into the poem. Whatever the tone of the inclusion, the tool lends an aesthetic momentum to the poem of which it becomes a part. The theme of "anxiety" enters a complex play, not so much with its poetic predecessors as with the composition process itself. To ironize the earlier attempts by others to capture and classify his poetic self is to move beyond them, both taking a distance toward them and turning them into the material of the poem.

The series of meandering shifts of tone, the sense of a continuous search for the right mode combined with the action of moving away from the expected, thus produce a singular report, a not fully explicable yet enticing collection which, the poem implies, is the only reliable self-recognition. The set of collectibles closing the poem, with its various reworkings of materials that mix biography and criticism, replaces the story of the "true" autobiography, shedding a strange light on it, and becoming its uncanny analogue. There are two kinds of autobiographical references here: strictly biographical motifs, such as the apple trees in the first stanza, which are reminiscent of Ashbery's childhood spent on an apple farm in New York state, and objects and images related to earlier poems or critical terms, such as the "anxiety of influence," which have become associated with them. Importantly, the two types of reference blend within one poetic structure. The facts of "biography" merge with earlier poems or the discourse on them. In this

way, Ashbery's poetry constructs a view-point of aesthetic externality, a distance from which to look at the predictability of empirical biography, a distance from which biography appears as something strange—possibly as something that is also created. Such point of view is constructed, and we must inquire of the agent of its construction. The compositional evasiveness of the poem—its mixture of irony and distance, of fact and aesthetic process—becomes a residue of the emergent poetic self. This "self" is the implied inhabitant of the platform from which the empirical self appears as a kind of creation, too.

At first glance, the construct of the emerging self seems too ephemeral when compared with the self of biographical data, which, although largely clichéd and vulnerable to systematic surveillance, seems to possess a greater degree of stability. And yet, a careful reading of some of Ashbery's *ekphrastic* poems from his later phase may show how this dependence is in fact reversed. The operations of putting in and leaving out, of collagistic filling of the space of the poem and of erasing material, present in Ashbery for a long time, have been borrowed by the poet from the experimental inventory of painting. This technical affinity with painting has been described by a number of critics. One of the fuller recent commentaries on these exchanges is David LeHardy Sweet's study *Savage Sight/Constructed Noise.*

LeHardy Sweet concentrates on volumes from Ashbery's early period, from *The Tennis Court Oath* to *Self-Portrait.* According to the critic, poems in these volumes use techniques developed by painters, allowing Ashbery to rewrite the prerogatives of both the more central tradition and the concept of avant-garde. Here the "avant-garde" is seen as an attempt, by various artists, to contest the institutionally established styles of utterance, whether in the visual arts or in poetry. LeHardy Sweet follows Ashbery's use of this term, as the poet refers to those artistic movements or moments—such as the proto-Surrealism of Roussel, the early phase of Abstract Expressionism, or the New York School of poetry before it became a widely acknowledged poetic phenomenon—which proliferate on the outskirts of the centrally accepted aesthetics. It also seems that Ashbery associates the term avant-garde with a tendency to experiment with form—in painting or poetry—beyond the boundary of what is allowed by the critical and academic "establishment" (Ashbery, "Avant-Garde" 390). The redrawing of the received lines of division between the center and the periphery that LeHardy Sweet traces in Ashbery lets the poet avoid, once the avant-garde becomes dominant in the artistic culture, a wholesale cultural acceptance, which would be destructive for the artist (LeHardy Sweet 236–237). In his balancing between an all-too-easy cultural cooptation as a difficult avant-garde poet and as a representative of central traditions, Ashbery follows proto-surrealists such as Roussel and post-Abstract Expressionist painters in order to achieve a specific sort of authorial disappearance. Among the painterly techniques that LeHardy Sweet discusses are collage and the use of flat

diction, borrowed, for example, from Jasper Johns's and Robert Rauschenberg's fascination with ready-mades. These strategies are employed by Ashbery in the interest of "a deadpan collagism that highlights the self-abnegating character of his poetry… against the self-assertiveness of Abstract Expresssionist art in its insistence on personal immediacy, energy, action" (LeHardy Sweet 248). As a result, Ashbery's avant-garde stance can be seen as a contradiction of the vibrant, energetic, psychologized, Romantic self, detected behind the work of De Kooning or Pollock. In contrast, Ashbery opts for an "automatism" that, far from being "instinctual," is "merely mechanical, convenient," producing "the same 'impression of absence' that one finds in Johns's painting" (257).

If Ashbery practices a form of authorial disappearance, such banishing trick is performed for the sake of an advanced reader of poetry, who is now freed from certain illusions about self and language. It is hard to suspect, however, that readers would be so enlightened through interaction with the poem, if the poem itself did not behave as an involving, attractive, pleasurable conversationalist. The flow of the compositional pleasure that drives the poem should be treated as the signal of an active self—not necessarily identical with the empirical author—that installs itself in the poem. We have already seen how this self begins to emerge, attached to the stances of externality that mix biography with the poetic occasion. Let us now inquire into the chances of this self receiving any sort of more lasting authentication, bearing in mind that such authentication is something different from the authenticity of the traditional expressive subject.

The Reality of the "Emerging Self"

Ashbery's interest in painting continues well into his late phase and cannot be reduced to a conscious borrowing of techniques which suit one critical discourse, such as the discourse of the erasure of the author. Rather, in this poetry, there is a complex interaction with paintings of various styles and periods that leads to the poem as a prolonged active response to painting. If it is true that Ashbery, like Johns or Rauschenberg, refuses to organize the energies of the aesthetic object so that they reflect the self-organizing powers of the authorial subject (LeHardy Sweet 249, 250), then my claim is that what is organized is the poem itself—the poem as a quasi-self. Here, however, "organization" does not mean the coherence of a totality but the freshness and accountability of the poem's passage. It is this freshness that is always at stake in Ashbery's poetry, as it offers glimpses of a new entity, a new self, caught in transition. The poem's interaction with painting activates and enhances a fluid self whose method of authentication is different from that of the biographical self which seeks expression through its literary avatar.

This approach might also help us to understand Ashbery's stance toward the dialectic of tradition and the avant-garde. In Ashbery's reinterpretation of these terms, tradition stands for the idea of the subject as an autonomous decision-making entity, external and prior to the event of the aesthetic experience, using language as a tool for expressing the reality of the biographical subject. The avant-garde, in turn, represents a departure from this idea for the sake of a subjectivity that is coincidental with the poetic process itself. Here, the avant-garde is the skill of imparting reality to something as volatile as the poetic experience.

Ashbery's painterly pursuits go beyond the evolutions of the post war American art scene. What can we make of his fascination with Vermeer or his mentioning of such painters as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Jean-Babtiste Greuze? What Ashbery the poet takes from Ashbery the art critic is the understanding that painting requires a prolonged interaction, that significant visual experience is never immediate, and that appreciation of the aesthetic object requires time. The process activates unexpected responses by distant areas of selfhood, which are thus both sustained and screened from leveling by bureaucratic knowledge. I see Ashbery's later poems as such prolonged *ekphrastic* records, even when no specific painting is referred to. The *ekphrastic* gesture we see in the poems which contain clear references to recognizable painterly works develops into a method that seems to organize haphazard material intercepted into other poems, those in which no specific painting is in view. This enhancement, while not a rule, might be traced in numerous lyrics of the later period.

On the view I am proposing, Ashbery's poems function as advanced descriptions of paintings in which description is replaced by a mixture of narrative and associations. However extraneous to the visibility of the painting, they become the very fabric of one's own attraction to it. In fact, they become the major context in which the painting's visibility may be held. As such, they are translations of the uniqueness of one's interaction with the aesthetic object. This uniqueness belongs not so much to any biographical subject, however, nor to the object, but to the situation, that is to the poem. This aesthetic can be witnessed in such poems as "View of Delft" from *Chinese Whispers*:

> The afternoon is slow, slower and slower
> until a full stop is reached
> long before anyone realized it.
> Only the faintest nip in the air
> causes these burghers to become aware
> that their time is passing too, and then but fitfully.
>
> Go stack those bricks over there.
> See what the horse is doing.
> Everything around you is waiting.

It is now apologized for.
The sky puts a finger to its lips.
The most optimistic projections confirm
the leakage theory. Another drop in temperature
is anticipated. It's all about standing still,
isn't it? That and remaining in touch with
a loose-fitting impression of oneself:
oneself at fifteen, out at night
or at a party in the daytime.

Then the sneezes got up to go. (18)

Rather than come up with a presentation of the visual details of Vermeer's famous painting, Ashbery presents a simulated participation in the scene it depicts. Using certain props which signal kinship with the painting, the poem places itself inside it, obliterating borders between the two apparently different aesthetic objects. We hear voices of the imagined conversation between the human figures in the picture. The description of the weather is by somebody who is inside, directly experiencing the stillness of the quiet afternoon hour. The painting and the poem merge, their generic borderlines receding behind the particular type of sensation that has given rise to them.

It may be noticed that this short simulated narrative rehearses one of Ashbery's life-long preoccupations: the attempt to experience and arrest the passage of time. This is the idea that Ashbery's Parmigianino from "Self-Portrait in the Convex Mirror" manages to materialize within his space-time congealing ball of perfect artistic self-consciousness. Ashbery's interpretation of Parmigianino's visual contraption makes it into a self-contained space in which all movement in space-time is suspended by the centrally reigning authorial presence. The power of the artist's gaze bends time-space, and pins things down to its gravitational pull, causing all alterity to vanish:

I see in this only the chaos
of your round mirror which organizes everything
around the polestar of your eyes…
…
desk, papers, books,
Photographs of friends, the window and the trees
Merging in one neutral band…
…
Why it should all boil down to one
Uniform substance, a magma of interiors (*Portrait* 71)

Importantly, this "magma," the sucking in of all space so that it falls under the control of the central self, is also a time-arresting device. All time is programmed

in the "whole" that Parmigianino's globe represents: "*Le temps*, the word for time… which / Follows a course wherein changes are merely / Features of a whole. The whole is stable within" (70). Commenting on Parmigianino's spherical space, as rendered in Ashbery's poem, one critic writes: "The medium is a timeless zone, seasonless. It creates its own special unwavering climate, its own time-count" (Lieberman 30).

Ashbery's interaction with Vermeer's painting opens on just this same sort of temporal arrest. The painting, at least for Ashbery's speaker, affects a freezing of time, "until a full stop is reached." Vermeer isolates an ordinary afternoon in Delft, which, singled out, stares at the viewer with the strangeness of being extracted from the normal temporal sequence. The motifs and references to freezing, thickening of some substance, waiting, removal from the feel of time as a series of moments, proliferate in the latter part of the poem. Again, Ashbery's musing on the painting returns him to earlier poetic occasions of similar musings, motifs, traces of earlier poems. These, now, have become the proper facts of an "autobiography." The previous poems have been integrated and become part of Ashbery's life.

But such poetic readings of painting, inseparable from re-readings of his own poems, can use much more fantastic imagery, and be much less referable to particular paintings. How should we approach the strange disquisition on familial situations in "The Evening of Greuze," another painterly exercise from the same period, contained in the volume *Chinese Whispers*? The first stanza is a familiar shuffled mixture of loosely connected statements, among which we learn of a skillful "brother-in-law" who has "fixed" the speaker a "tower in the mill." Later, other strange structures appear: "Across the road they are building a cement house. / It will seemingly have no windows. A columbarium / for cement pigeons" (*Chinese* 53).

Is this another ordinary evening, a moment of which gets selected for special appreciation, which results in its embalming? Not quite. This poem seems more dynamic, with no recognizable painterly object in view. Rather, the piece presents a motley collection of observations with no central point of reference. And yet, the mechanism of selection is not accidental. What exactly is a cement house, a windowless columbarium for "cement pigeons"? The poem speaks of heights, of watching things from a point that is physically elevated. The first stanza's "tower in the mill" influences our reception of the later appearing "cement house" and "columbarium," and we see these structures related to a sense of height. The elevated point of view coupled with a note of something overwhelming and ominous in the depiction, might be reminiscent of the Manhattan residential environments with which the empirical author of the poem is associated. The "columbarium" also might evoke some of Joseph Cornell's box compositions which have been an

important point of reference for Ashbery. A number of Cornell's works on the theme of the "dovecote," or "columbarium," are very tightly related in terms of their method of composition to others which draw upon the theme of windows and window facades. In both cases, the compositions are based on rectangular grids of wooden elements, creating a matrix of slots or niches, which are either blank or contain plain objects, the whole grid playing with the idea of vacancy. Thus the "columbarium" mentioned in the poem, recalling Cornell's "dovecotes," may remind the reader of window facades, which, in turn, brings in the kind of cityscape that would be familiar to the poet.

Rather than confronting a specific painting by Greuze, it is better to think of this poem as a dream of somebody stretched between epochs, spaces, and contexts. The dream consists of elements coming from diverse sources. We may be viewing a painting by Greuze, with its grim late evening atmosphere; but this ambiance becomes a background for a collage of elements related simultaneously to the facts of the poet's empirical biography as well as his long-standing artistic preferences and practices. What matters here is the process of composition, which can be treated as either an inquiry into or a response to a more or less real aesthetic object. In such compositions, however, much more is at stake than mere inquiry. Ashbery's *ekphrasis* makes it clear to us that there is no such thing as pure description. In this, his poetry brings us to a theory of description proposed by Alexander Nehamas.

According to Nehamas, a prolonged interaction with an aesthetic object consists of a special kind of examination of the object which is inseparable from its interpretation: "the distinction between merely describing what a work of art is and interpreting what it means… can't be systematically maintained" (*Promise* 122–123). In such description/interpretation, the object emerges for us in the plethora of its connections to, but also differences from, other objects. It is revealed to us as an expanding network of relations, an active, ever more visible surface: "Interpretation doesn't push the manifest content of a work aside in order to reveal the real meaning hidden beneath… 'Depth' is a metaphor… the deeper it is, the more it encompasses" (*Promise* 123–124). It is within this expanding surface of established relations that the object becomes revealed; we obtain the object in its relations to other objects: "we… look at interpretation as establishing a web of connections between the elements of one thing and between one thing and another" (*Promise* 124).

However, experiencing the object as such an expanding network of connections involves becoming immersed in a vaster process, aesthetic, cognitive, and ontological, in which the object receives its uniqueness, and in which this uniqueness is inseparable from the budding, changing, expanding uniqueness of the viewer. A new viewer, new commentator/interpreter, comes into being, a being that was

not there before, and who is an outcome of the event of the active description/interpretation itself:

> To interpret is to try to see in things what is distinctly their own. This in turn is to see them in ways that are distinctly our own… in finding beauty we create it ourselves…. Beauty so understood is a matter of distinction, of standing out among things of one's kind, whether people or objects. (Nehamas, *Promise* 133)

Interpretation so conceived becomes an "arrangement," and it is "part of anything that is importantly new… *It constitutes an individual*" (*Promise* 133, emphasis mine). But how does this newly constituted individual exist, where is it, and what about its identity? In the case of the poems we have looked at, the individual resides not only within the compositional twists and turns of the individual texts, but also within longer series of poems which constitute a larger bio-textual body: it is a hypothetical agent of the gestures made by the compositional process of each poem, and of the correspondences between the poems. This is what Nehamas, again, describes in one of his earlier works, in which he disputes Foucault's thesis of the disappearance of the author, as the implied agent of the text and of the *oeuvre* of which the text is a part ("Writer" 273–275). An author figure, far from preceding the textual event, is located, or in fact constituted, by our interpretive (in the sense explained above) engagement with the texts, an engagement that befalls both the reader and its writer, the poet himself. Here, interpretation is divorced from the idea of explicating deeply hidden meanings and becomes a procedure in which "we account for the features of an object by appealing to the features of an unusual original agent whose action we take it to be" ("Writer" 277).

Ashbery's writing emanates an awareness of this process. His poems are enhanced acts of interpretation of objects, such as paintings, in the Nehamasian sense. Numerous poems in his volumes of the 2000's can be seen as examples of the expansion of the *ekphrastic* gesture I mentioned above. In *Chinese Whispers,* for instance, the beautiful "View of Delft" is preceded by a short lyric called "Disclaimer." Its opening fragment contains a succession of remarks whose descriptive character is not validated by any clearly materializing place, but which are not different in their fictive quality from the *ekphrastic* opening of "View of Delft": "Quiet around here. The neighbors, / in wider arcs, getting to know each other. / The fresh falling away" (*Chinese* 6). Is this an indeterminate description of a place, a neighborhood? Or is there a memory of a painting, whose title is forgotten, that is encoded here? More importantly—is there a difference? In Ashbery's *poesis* each instance of finding oneself in the vicinity of objects—aesthetic or "ordinary"—is an act of aesthetic construction. As such enhanced descriptive acts, his poems outline, or generate, the implied agents of the descriptions—hypothetical subjects who may be projected to stand behind the unfolding

description/interpretation. It is also possible to trace genealogical relations of such descriptive passages over the expanse of the entire *oeuvre*. The subjectivity that is thereby obtained never precedes the process, and, as such, can never be understood as given beforehand.

We are back with Ashbery's variety of "avant-garde": the banishing of the illusion of a stable reality preceding the event may be in the interest of constructing a new version of it. What is banished is the myth of the given: the subject of a biography that can be depicted through bureaucratic authentication or "expressed" in a poem. Here, the authentication is different. The dismissal of the given ushers in the newly composed. The poetic experience, even as it leaves behind or annuls the dominance of one's biography—the cliché ridden self—launches a new constellation, an enhanced network of enriched contexts that constitute the emergent self. But this emergent self, which, as we have seen it working for Ashbery, carries with it a mixture of materials or traces of earlier emergent events—of earlier poems as biographical "facts"—is now also included in the subject's "biography." Biography becomes inextricably enmeshed with the poetics.

The Special Reality of the Poetic Biography

The merging of the empirical and the poetic we have been following so far tells us something about the very structure of biographical facts. The tracing of the nebulous transitions between poems provides a channel of communication with one's self, which becomes a gesture of rewriting one's "empirical" past. This past has now proved to have always been part of an aesthetic object that could never have been anticipated before it actually came to being. The new poem invades the past moment, and newly reveals its meaning, in a way that it has never been revealed before. This revelation of a new meaning is synonymous with the past itself being a highly unstable notion that is continually open to reinterpretation.

This is what happens in the latter parts of both "View of Delft" and "The Evening of Greuze." Both poems bump into some skewed, veiled, indirect references to the notion of the self, the autobiographical self of the poet, with its "facts," which now, however, are closely related to the moments of aesthetic creation. At one moment in "View of Delft" the speaker says: "it's all about… remaining in touch / with a loose-fitting impression of oneself: / oneself at fifteen, out at night" (Ashbery, *Chinese* 18). When he adds, later in the poem, "Oh sure, I knew it was me all along", the statement is double-edged. Its first impact is ironic: here is another distancing of the poem's self from the "facts" and events of autobiography, which begin to be less real than the poem which is now revisiting them. It is as if the speaker were pretending to be worried by the distance he has achieved,

and felt the need to reassure himself, or his readers, that, yes, those fragmentary images are of a more or less coherent empirical self. But on a different level, the statement points in the direction of this distant, newly emerging, implied authorial self of the poem, the subject of a new kind of knowledge, external to the poet's biography at each of its unveilings. The whole process reaches back to and establishes a new communication with this earlier, much younger self of the author. As it does so, however, we also understand that the author's empirical self must be aware of its distant poetic counterpart and stay open to future visitations by poems yet to be written. This is how one's literary output truly alters one's past "biography." It is poetry—a literary "fiction"—which reaches back and validates a "fact," of which the originary structure must have already been eligible for such a visitation if it is ever to enter into any level of reality at all. The moments of a biography so composed cease to be hard facts immune to poetic re-description. The poem invests in the communication channel between the two versions of the self when it says: "it's all about… / remaining in touch with / a loose-fitting impression of oneself" (*Chinese* 18). It is this laxity, this area of fuzziness, open by irony and skepticism, that represents the readiness of the empirical self to become validated by being revisited by future poems. The "reality" of biography does not depend on any hard facts; it depends on its capacity to include the poetic.

A similar exchange confounding the genuinely biographical and the aesthetic is found towards the end of "The Evening of Greuze":

> And ever as I talked to you
> down the decades in my letters one thing was unsure:
> your reply…
> Try to keep
> cold and empty in this bare room.
> Examine mirrors in the studio. (Ashbery *Chinese* 53)

The mirrors in the studio are paintings, and, by extension, Ashbery's poems which came to being as responses to paintings. These mirrors evoke Parmigianino's bizarrely angelic self-portrait, Ashbery's poem-dialogue with Parmigianino's version of the authorial self's centrality, and, furthermore, other poems, such as "View of Delft." As the emergent self of a new poem invades the facts of the poet's empirical biography, it also revisits the poetic component of this biography, as the two components are not to be separated by now.

As I noted earlier, Ashbery's avant-garde transitionality of the questing self carries with it certain dangers. Its difference from the traditionally stable subject of the strictly "empirical" biography, its resistance to "realization" along any controllable trajectory, exacts its risks. Ashbery's poems of the later phase reveal an awareness of this risk. The skepticism and the ironic distance towards the

empirical moments that enable this type of "self-creation" by literature may elicit emotional coldness. And yet it is such chilly climates that the poet recommends to his future created selves when he says: "try to keep / cold and empty in this bare studio."

In the later phase of Ashbery's writing, however, there are also signals that his poetics is now not only aware of its own vicissitudes but also more appreciative and affirmative of them. The processes leading to the birth of the questing self and its specific merger with the biographical is the theme of many poems in *Where Shall I Wander* and *A Worldly Country*. In "More Feedback" we encounter the following mixture of banality and mystery: "Our work keeps us / up late nights; there is no more joy / or sorrow than in what work gives…. / … there is so little / that gives and says it gives" (*Wander* 46). The mysterious entity "that gives and says it gives" is an ingenuous formula for a lasting substance that survives its own self-proclamation. Whatever the entity under discussion is, its nature—its identity—is not a stable essence, but the very act of "giving." The crucial idea, though, is that the generosity mentioned does not cease after the identity of its source—the act of giving itself—is revealed. Unlike the subject of empirical autobiography, it remains alive after being self-declared and self-identified. The thing "that gives and says it gives" is a tautological metaphor of poetic power that is here heard asserting itself. The declaration points to the work of the poem itself, as if it were bragging of its continuous freshness. The poem "gives" itself—offers itself—as it declares this very activity. The movement of the poem (the "work [that] keeps us / up late nights"), which is also the integrative work of poetics as autobiography, is here rising to the consciousness of self-affirmation.

The Emergent Self and the Poetics of Plenitude

Strangeness, distance, vacuity and coldness are at the base of the poetic process, which now is validated in itself. But it is not enough to rest on the idea that this validation is a form of a self-proclaimed aesthetic independence from the non-literary. Ashbery's poetics, the poetics I have called here the poetics of the emergent self, is part of a "poetics of plenitude," an aesthetic concept I have been developing elsewhere, with reference to pragmatist models of relations between epistemology and aesthetics.[3] The major idea behind the concept is related to the neo-pragmatist refusal to see any action in language, of whose the poem would be the most concentrated instance, as a "representation" of any "reality"

3 See footnote 1.

that precedes this action. Instead, the pragmatist poetics of plenitude sees the poem as constitutive of emergent realities; the poem truly is "a cry of its occasion," to recall Stevens's enigmatic formulation from his "Ordinary Evening in New Heaven" (404). As such, the poetics of plenitude is also an attempt to sort out in a fresh way the vexed relations between the poetic output and the poet's biography. The poems of this poetics retain their aesthetic independence and keep a distance from the facts of biography, while at the same time keeping a vital channel of access to the biographical layer by reversing the confessional model.

In this way, the approach I am proposing is an amending complementation to the recent return of the biographical in the critical thought on Ashbery. While Vincent and Epstein reach back to the biographical, I have tried to say more about an elusive transitional area in which the poetic is in a very special sense prior to the biographical, paradoxical as it sounds. Juxtaposed with Vincent's formula, I am showing how Ashbery's biography is both personally "real" and poetic through and through at the same time. Unlike Vincent, I do in fact want to return to one specific "shape," one "authorial personality" entirely modeled by an insistent poetic lineage. This shape, this "personality," is not a an empirical being processed by the poetic utterance as confession. But neither is it only a general collection of self-reflexive stances that offer insight into a cultural context. Instead, it is a being whose ontology is poetic-self creation. It gives us a "John Ashbery," an individual created by his poems. My discussion with Epstein, which involves an argument with his notion of continuous transitionality of Ashbery's selves is more complex, and I am developing it in a separate article.[4]

Viewed in relation to the problem of poetic autobiography, the poetics of plenitude strikes a residue of poetic potentiality within the sediments of the "facts" of biography: the self-validation of the poetic affects the biographical, and excavates new light in its midst. Without it, the non-literary would itself be incomplete. The life-long interaction with the constructed spaces of the poems, the spaces whose action blends the poetically-created with the biographical, makes the reader/writer their genuine inhabitant, a native whose first-hand knowledge of their climates is not to be ignored nor in any other way dismissed as a fiction. This knowledge, which is a form of self-knowledge, becomes a source of authenticity of a new kind. It is validated when the questing self becomes able to find significance in a temporaly extensive procession of its artifice. We can hear this questing self of the aesthetic process, authenticating its shape, granting itself its reality, at the end of a poem called "For Now":

4 See Bartczak, „Change and the Poetics of Plenitude in Wallace Stevens and John Ashbery"; forthcoming in *Text Matters*.

> We brought something else—
> some enlightenment we thought the months
> might enjoy in their gradual progress through the years:
> 'sudden realizations,' the meaning of dreams
> and travel and how hotel rooms
> can become the meaningful space one has always lived in (Ashbery *Country* 8)

It is in the created "hotel rooms" of the poems, the hotel trope putting Ashbery next to his favorite artists, such as Cornell or Roussel, that the poet lives. Such a life of "externality," cold and precarious as it is, leaves behind it an eventually warmer trail: it becomes a habitation space, a home, or a spacious edifice, more plentiful and more alive than any literally understood biography. What I have been elsewhere calling "the poetics of plenitude" is here seen to blur the poetic and the biographical, nourishing the latter and making it indistinguishable from the body of poetry. It is not just a poetic "self" that is created; empirical events receive a legitimating perspective, thus enriching and expanding the sense of the real. In general, through my readings of Wallace Stevens as a predecessor of Richard Rorty's irony, I use the term "poetics of plenitude" to refer to the ironic quality of the poems—such as Ashbery's poems—which find themselves as constitutive of the "real" events: the poem of plenitude rediscovers the poetic element (an element akin to itself) right at the empirical base of reality. Reality, such as the reality of one's biography, is a version—just one version—of possible personal interpretive reactions to events. It is such interpretive reactions that evolve into a "biography," and the poems reveal those interpretive acts as inseparable from the aesthetic sense. In fact, the poem itself is an expression of the inseparability of the interpretive and the aesthetic.

Additionally, the poem also reveals how one set of the interpretive/aesthetic thread by which events turn into "biography" is always accompanied by multiple other such threads. The official "biography" of a poet is just one composition line—a specific lineage of aesthetic/interpretive reactions to events, a thread which joins the fortuitous extraneous materials that the artist intercepts into his or her life—life as a poem, that is. Such single interpretive/aesthetic threads are enabled by the fact that they are parts of larger networks of possible interpretive connections. The poem of plenitude evokes this larger network: it "knows" that the shapes of compositions are plentiful, and the point of Ashbery's *poesis* is that the alternative aesthetic paths never recede but maintain active communication channels with the official version of the self, that version which the biographer will propound one day as "the life of John Ashbery." This official "biography" of the poet will only be a pale reflection of the more capacious biography: the one developed over the entire *oeuvre* of the poems of plenitude. In the world of this poetry, one's reality is an authenticity of a plenitude of paths which coexist and nourish each other.

A very apt comment on this self-authenticating capacity of an artificial, artistic process can be found, again, in Nehamas. Remarking on the inescapability of self-constitution in the process of appreciating the beautiful, Nehamas notes: "I may have managed to put things together in my own manner and form. I may have established, through what I loved, a new way of looking at the world, and left it, if only by a little, richer than I had found it" (*Promise* 134). This seemingly cold and impersonal poetry is there for us to confer meaning on what may otherwise turn out quite meaningless, and in so doing to endow our selves with the quality of the real.

The poetics of self-creation, an aspect of the poetics of plenitude, is a specific treatment of biography. Not ignoring the critiques of the philosophical subject, it evolves a text-bound authorial agency that consolidates separate poems into a continuous and meaningful form of life, thereby also annulling the conundrums posed by the confessional model. Such practice allows the biographical to be recuperated without generating the "confessional" tensions between the need for honesty and the aesthetic needs of the poem. The process itself is a form of commitment whose nature is transformational: it imparts degrees of connective reality on strings of "empirically" rampant and fortuitous "facts." When so touched, they become a life.

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Brian Brodhead Glaser

The Spiritual Work of Art in the Poetry of Robert Duncan

Abstract: In this essay I argue Hegelian phenomenology helps us to see that language can be a form of postmodern spirituality. I aim to contextualize postmodern poetry in a dialogue between spirituality and art that, I suggest, we can join Hegel in viewing as older than Christianity. Both *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Robert Duncan's postmodernism show us that language is a spiritual means for transcendence of the self. In the first section of the essay I look at how Duncan used syntactic choices in the writing of poems as the occasion for self-transformation, contrasting the models of poetic structure in two of his books of the 1960s, *The Opening of the Field* (1960) and *Bending the Bow* (1968), on the basis of what these two different structural models foreground about Duncan's syntactic decisions. In the second section of the essay, I analyze Hegel's phenomenological narrative of the hymn, focusing on his discussion of the role that language plays in this dimension of spiritual life. In the concluding section, I return to Robert Duncan's later poetry, arguing that Hegel's conception of the hymn can help us to see that Duncan moved in his creative work from using syntax as a means for self-transformation to turning to it as a resource for self-transcendence.

Keywords: Hegel, Robert Duncan, form, poetics, spirituality

Postmodern poetry in English decisively changed how poets engage with self-expression in the twenty-first century. Postmoderns showed that lyric writing which refuses the concept of selfhood—and related ideas like authenticity and integrity—can articulate innovative, improvisatory modes of consciousness, creating obviously original states of thinking. The poetry of nonself expression, if I may offer that term for it, has thoroughly transformed fashion in poetry.

Charles Olson was the acknowledged leader of this movement. One of its initial and enduring luminaries is Robert Duncan. He is an interestingly problematic figure in and for this tradition, however, because of his association of form with the desire for self-transformation and self-transcendence. Unlike Olson, Duncan thought of poetic form as a means for ecstatic self-transcendence. In this essay, I propose that Duncan's postmodernity shows the continuing relevance of Hegelian thought to twenty-first-century poetics. Specifically, I argue that the concept of

language Hegel develops in his discussion of the hymn in *Phänomenologie des Geistes (Phenomenology of Spirit*) can help readers to see the spiritual dimensions of Duncan's explorations of the experience of nonself expression.

By offering in *Phenomenology of Spirit* a phenomenological narrative in which spirit is expressed through various forms of selfhood, Hegel can make a contribution to our understanding of postmodern poetry in particular and what has been called the postmodern condition more generally. Specifically, postmodern skepticism about the coherence of the self is anticipated by Hegel, and he responds to this skepticism with an idea that must also find its place in a sufficiently diverse story of postmodernism. In his narrative, the self is ultimately transcended in the experience of the spiritual work of art. Hegelian phenomenology reveals that language can be a form of postmodern spirituality.

The antipathy to religious faith that runs through one strand of modernism stands between Hegel's Christian phenomenology and postmodernism. By telling the story of Duncan's spiritual postmodernism in a phenomenological way, I do not mean to ignore this crucial difference. Rather, I aim to contextualize postmodern poetry in a dialogue between spirituality and art that, I suggest, we can join Hegel in viewing as older than Christianity. Both *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Duncan's postmodernism show us that language is a spiritual means for transcendence of the self.

It is important to articulate from the start why I choose a passage of Hegel's *Phenomenology* which is merely a point of development in his narrative of spirit and not the ultimate destination (which is absolute knowledge, philosophically attained). After his discussion of the hymn as a spiritual work Hegel goes on to discuss spirit as expressed through revealed religion and then philosophy. But for a story of the development of a postmodern poet like Duncan, religion and philosophy are not available as models for the kind of self-transcendence that poetic form offers. Informed by a postmodern skepticism with respect to the grand narratives about salvation that support Christianity, Duncan makes poems instead of making prayers. And his attention to poetic form—which I will discuss in what follows—makes the abstraction of philosophy less of a resource than an obstacle.

What draws me to Hegel's description of the hymn is also a particular dimension of his larger discussion of the role of language in the phenomenology of spirit. The spiritual work of art is the last point in Hegel's narrative at which language per se is essential to the development of spirit. And so it is the furthest point that language can be taken in a spiritual poetics. Seeing the similarities between Duncan's poetics and Hegel's analysis of what is spiritual in the work of language can allow us to see how much of phenomenology is still available to a postmodern poetic consciousness.

Duncan's Self-Transformations

As an example of Duncan's early organization of the relations among poetry, selfhood and desire, take a work of the early 1950s, "Source," a prose poem in which he comes to language through the metaphor of a stream and traces its urge toward oceanic melding with a sense of the split in language between the reflection of the mind and the unceasing currents of experience:

> When I was about twelve—I suppose about the age of Narcissus—I fell in love with a mountain stream. There, most intensely for a summer, staring into its limpid cold rush, I knew the fullest pain of longing. To be of it, entirely, to be out of my being and enter the Other clear impossible element. The imagination, old shape-shifter, strecht itself painfully to comprehend the beloved form....
> I write this only to explain some of the old ache of longing that revives when I apprehend again the currents of language—rushing upon their way, or in pools, vacant energies below meaning, hidden to our purposes. Often, reading or writing, the fullest pain returns, and I see or hear or almost know a pure element of clearness, an utter movement, an absolute rush along its own way, that makes of even the words under my pen a foreign element that I may crave—as for kingdom or salvation or freedom—but never know. (*Selected Poems*, 52–53)

The view of the role of selfhood in poetics expressed by this poem is not a fascination with the work's possibilities for channeling descriptive elegance into insight—the fashion of its time. The narcissism this poem confesses is not pathologized, either, because it is transitional—it has to do with the poem's capacity to lead the self to dissolve into the transpersonal energies available in language through the materializing force of that self's desiring. The "fullest pain" Duncan knows in writing is a longing for the element resting in the "currents of language," surfaces that reflect their escape from him in the moment that they reflect his presence. Making poems takes him to a domain of ecstatic experience where he is aware that the condition of his access to this foreign "absolute" is the form-giving work of writing.

I want in this section of the essay to look at how Duncan came to think of his own syntactic choices in the writing of the poem as the occasion for self-transformation, contrasting the models of poetic structure in two of his books of the 1960s, *The Opening of the Field* (1960) and *Bending the Bow* (1968), on the basis of what these two different structural models foreground about Duncan's syntactic decisions. Two poetic projects—*The Structure of Rime* and *Passages*, respectively—inform these two books, the first of which involves a labor to fulfill an ideal of grammaticality through the poem, and the second of which seeks to undo that expectation of grammaticality in the service of semantic excess. Both of these

books also have near their beginnings a relatively formally simple, first-person, beautiful lyric poem. In these acutely personal poems, I will argue, we can see Duncan's yearning self-transformation most intensely expressed in the terms of his underlying strategies for framing his syntactic choices. So looking at a commonality between these poems should give us a point of contrast with the first person lyric of his 1985 work *Ground War: Before the War*, "Interrupted Forms," in which the consequences of his re-conceptualization of the relation of syntax to poetic structure are striking, and self-transcendence rather than self-transformation seems to be the aim.

The Opening of the Field, the poems of which were written between 1953 and 1959, is the first of Duncan's works to show the influence of Charles Olson's idea of open field composition, an aesthetic he came to know in the course of his teaching at Black Mountain College in 1955. In this respect, the first poem of the volume, "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," is distinctive because it was written two years before Duncan went to Black Mountain, and so bears none of the marks of Olson's influence that the subsequent poems of the volume do. Yet already one gets from this poem a powerful sense of the yearning for transformation that informs Duncan's writing, and of the role of poetic structure in leading him to it. For Duncan describes the field in which the poem will occur as

> an eternal pasture folded in all thought...
> Wherefrom fall all architectures I am
> I say are likenesses of the First Beloved
> whose flowers are flames lit to the lady. (4, 8–10)

Invoking the beloved lady, the celestial rose and the three-line stanza of the *Paradiso,* Duncan signals from the outset the "likenesses" his poem will share with Dante's spiritual journey. So it is with this structural invocation that his volume as a series of poems steps forward, compelled by both the passion of the Christian visionary and the direction of his will, the ecstatic dissolution of a self drawn slowly into articulation.

But, as in "Source," it seems here that only the processes of writing make possible such transformation. In this respect, the escape-through-return enacted by "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" is a transforming discovery for Duncan, because it allows him to search through the "architecture" of language to the source of such freedom—a liberty imagined as a parental permission to join other children in play. As the first five lines put this:

OFTEN I AM PERMITTED TO RETURN TO A MEADOW

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind,
that is not mine, but is a made place,

that is mine, it is so near to the heart,
an eternal pasture folded in all thought (1–4)

The poem is dressed up in the world of childhood: the "scene made-up" of the meadow, the pert naming of what is and is not "mine," and, in following lines, the "Queen Under the Hill" of nursery rhyme and the "children's game / of ring a round of roses told" (7, 17–18). Duncan is searching in the real field of the poem's language for permission corresponding to the one that set a boy free, in his recollected childhood, to an actual meadow. And it is in the "secret" of the "children's game" at the center and circumference of this poem that he finds it:

It is only a dream of the grass blowing
east against the source of the sun
in an hour before the sun's going down

whose secret we see in a children's game
of ring a round of roses told. (14–18)

This cluster of images of evening-time release recall the children at recess in the ring, the fields of gazing grain and the setting sun in the third stanza of Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death—." And perhaps Dickinson's ghostly presence in these words brings Duncan's poem to its pivotal moment more quickly than he would have reached it otherwise. But, perhaps more importantly, back of Duncan's poem—perhaps behind Dickinson's poem as well—is another lyric, "Ring around the Rosy" of the fourteenth century, with its frightened and frightening circular energies of falling and rising again. The "secret" shared by the grass blowing east—as if mowed down by the setting sun—and the ring of falling and rising children is the hopeful knowledge of the impermanence of death, the intuited promise of eternal return. Having come to this secret through the incantatory language that brought him to the meadow, such recognition lets Duncan speak the poem's final transformation in the cadence of certainty:

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
as if it were a given property of the mind
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission,
everlasting omen of what is. (19–23)

One elegance of this graceful poem is that we do not immediately hear how its last five lines return its first five: the first four lines of each sequence begin with the same words, revisiting the earlier phrases, and the corresponding lines' meanings are intimate reflections of each other. In the circular course of this poem, only the register of its speech has changed, risen to a new degree of knowing: a "scene made-up" has become "a given property," the "made place" has become the knowledge "that certain bounds hold against chaos," the "eternal pasture folded" has become the "everlasting omen of what is." The tones of law, philosophy and theology have replaced child-like talk. This poem has gone to school—the school of meditation on the eternal secrets of the world as they are revealed in song. Even in its strangest rhyme, in which the "s"-close of "chaos" and the stressed short-"i" of "permission" join to make its last "is," the poem works to take shape from its language's materials, the foreign element through which it rises and falls.

This spontaneous dynamic of transformation takes place within a formal structure, however, which sets a definite parameter around the syntactic shape that final sentence can take. The way that each of the first words of the last five lines echo the first words of the corresponding lines at the beginning of the poem—the first four literally ("often," "as if it," "that," "that is") and the fifth effectively ("an eternal" becomes "everlasting")—controls the sentence that may emerge. Rich as it is with its own sonic and connotative life, the last sentence of this poem happens on the template of lines that the opening of the poem has set for it.

By finding in the beginning of each line a guideline around which to have the sentence move, Duncan puts the tercet-base of the poem in the service of his aim for a transforming wrestling match with the ideal of the sentence that he calls, in the next poem of the book, "angelic Syntax" (11). It is this engagement with the numinous sentence of the laws of grammar that shapes the thirteen-part sequence of the book, *The Structure of Rime*, the first poem of which begins:

> I ask the unyielding Sentence that shows Itself forth in the language as I make it,
>
> Speak! For I name myself your master, who come to serve.
> Writing is first a search in obedience. (1–5)

The deepest appeal of this "search in obedience," passage after passage in *The Structure of Rime* series suggests, is that it will give Duncan the occasion to meld into the foreign element of language. Take as an example, later in the first of the series, the fantasy of religious melding that continues the metaphor of Jacob's wrestling match with the angel and shoots it through with allusions to the ground this encounter has in writing:

> O Lasting Sentence,
> sentence after sentence I make in your image. In the feet that
> measure the dance of my pages I hear cosmic intoxications of the
> man I will be. (30–33)

Only in the thrill of escape into writing can Duncan's own feet meld with an idea of prosodic feet and disappear into the pages of his book. In his subjection to the sentence of syntax Duncan glimpses and occasionally realizes a transformation of himself through the perpetual, indeed everlasting, motion of language.

Standing behind the multitude of poetic structures in *The Opening of the Field*, then—prose poems, ballads, open field compositions—is an ideal of the sentence into whose unfolding shape Duncan's consciousness can meld. One underlying standard of formal completeness that underwrites many of the poems in the book is that they find their end in a sentence like the last one in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," where the linking of words together seems to be caused as much by the forces set loose within the poem as by Duncan's own intentions. Consider as an example the various energies held in the closing lines of the last poem in the book, "Food for Fire, Food for Thought," a piece in which Duncan's search in obedience grows out of the statement that "Language obeyd flares tongues in obscure matter":

> We are close enough to childhood, so easily purged
> of whatever we thought we were to be,
>
> flamey threads of firstness go out from your touch.
>
> Flickers of unlikely heat
> at the edge of our belief bud forth. (32–36)

These lines seem to name the experience of open field composition, finding in liminal space, the edge of the known, the surprising energy that drives a poem forward, named not as the "fire" of the title of the poem, as what consumes and illuminates, but only as what we discover at its periphery: flickers of light, rushes of heat. We no sooner come into the proximity of fire as an image—perhaps the archetypal symbol of the permanence of change—than it seems to become a new flower, budding away from us and its own center. Yet what is elusive and suggestive as an image is made immediate by the returning sounds of the line. The long "e"s at the end of "unlikely" and in "heat" make one feel the warm constriction in the glottis in the only sound which briefly interrupts them, the fricative "h" of heat. And the two lines are also joined in metrical parallel for the first seven beats: they make a heptasyllabic couplet, the meter of "childhood" and nursery rhymes,

ending on the slant-rhyme "heat" and "belief." Heard this way, the second line has as a coda two one-syllable words, each of which begins with a labial consonant ("b" and "f") and ends with sounds in which the articulation of the breath has moved back to the tongue ("d" and "th"). This shift from the lips to the tongue enacts a repetition of the way that the tongue and the breath themselves, in the course of speaking poetry, shape the sounds we make—words open through the lips and bud forth from the edge of the tongue, the warm wavering of breath. As each of its words follows the one before it, this sentence moves its vision out of the writing mind and into the speaking mouth. The language of this passage has remained open to a shifting, evanescent image that seems to grow of out the description preceding it, and the progression of its sounds have made it live in the body.

As I interpret the notion of structural completeness that shapes most of the poems in *The Opening of the Field*, what makes each poem whole is Duncan's having found a sentence that enacts the fulfillment of both a syntactic parameter and a desire for transformation. The poems move forward toward an ideal of completion in which the sentence enacts a transformation—whether lexically, as in "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," or phonetically, as in "Food for Fire, Food for Thought." The role of structural parameters in achieving this transformation, by means of establishing repeated key-words in a five-line sentence or by means of an underlying heptasyllabic rhyme, is to guide the sentence into that expressive shape. In Duncan's analogy for syntax, in "The Law I Love is Major Mover," with the angel Jacob wrestled who gave him both a limp and a new name, syntax is most clearly seen as it works in shaping the volume's sufficiently "strong sentence," at once an energy to be restrained and a vehicle of transformation.

This much I take to have been the role of syntax in defining the structural completeness of the poems of *The Opening of the Field*. Over the course of the 1960s, Duncan continued to write poems in *The Structure of Rime* series, and numbers twenty-two through twenty-six appeared in his 1968 *Bending the Bow*. But over those years, too, Duncan's celebration of heterogeneity and flux had intensified and come to inflect his poetics in an increasingly noticeable way, a shift in values which he acknowledged in the very first words of that volume's preface: "We enter again and again the last days of our own history, for everywhere living productive forms in the evolution of forms fail, weaken, or grow monstrous, destroying the terms of their existence" (i). Duncan's sense of the poet's participation in the life of his language is as present as it was in "Source," but this perspective is now shaded with a complementary interest in the decadence or unmaking of forms. And this field of interest has become the domain of a second ongoing series, *Passages*, which with its 30 sections in the book counterbalances the exploration of the sentence in *The Structure of Rime*. The relation of poetry writing to nonself

experience remains central to his understanding, though now in a form that is less pained:

> the principle of all, 'we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams"—and remember that this 'nothing of our 'selves" occurs in the essay on 'Self-Reliance'—might stand as one of the many indicators of what I call 'Passages,' a work in which I seek to lose myself in the hearing of the voice of the work itself, a work not of personality or oneself but of structures and passages. (227)

The later poems, Duncan's title suggests, find their coherence not in the realization of grammatical syntax but in their capacity to make phrases into passages in both a scriptural and architectural sense. As he describes the book's novel conception of the poem further on in the preface: "The line of the poem is articulated into phrases so that phases of its happening resonate where they will. Or lines stand as stanzas in themselves of our intention. The sentence remains. But related to a multitude of laws" (v). In keeping with Duncan's growing interest in the deconstruction of received models of living productive forms, the poems of *Passages* strive to realize not the transformative sentence but the liberating phrase. It is only within the web of articulations suggested by that phrase that the "multitude of laws" can make and unmake their coherence.

To get a sense of the consequent shift in Duncan's approach toward poetic structure, take the incompatible set of articulations invited by the arrangement of phrases in the first lines of the first poem in the *Passages* sequence, "Tribal Memories":

> And to Her-Without –Bounds I send,
> wherever She wanders, by what
> campfire at evening,
>
> among tribes setting each the City where
> we Her people are
> at the end of a day's reaches here
> the Eternal
> lamps lit, here the wavering human
> sparks of heat and light
> glimmer, go out, and reappear. (1–10)

Framed by two quotations from the Emperor Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, the poem seeks to address the same kind of spectrally divine female presence that haunted sections of *The Structure of Rime*. But instead of wrestling with the sentence of his address, Duncan explodes it, cleaving away from any grammatical

reading of the sentence by continuing to link phrases to the isolated "here" that is the last plausible word in a sentence punctuated as this one is. In this passage the pivotal, isolated word "here" is both where "we Her people are" and where the "Eternal lamps" are lit, but it is also the word at which one sentence splits irremediably into two. The word is the last in one sentence and the first in another, and so it sends its syntactical influences to "resonate where they will," at once forward into how we read the words to come and backwards in our attempt to square what we have already heard with present phrases.

Duncan's urge to find a phrase that will re-organize all of the meanings implicit in its connections to the language around it seems most striking, in my view, not in the *Passages* sequence, but in a poem in some ways most like "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," a first-person lyric written in 1964, "My Mother Would Be a Falconress." Originally a part of a text called "A Lammas Tiding," which remains in *Bending the Bow* as a preface to the poem, "My Mother Would Be a Falconress" elaborates a dream in which Duncan was visited by a hawk, narrating over fourteen stanzas a vision of his own unsuccessful attempt as a gerfalcon to fly free of his mother's wrist. The first three stanzas of the searching poem read:

MY MOTHER WOULD BE A FALCONRESS

My mother would be a falconress,
And I, her gay falcon treading her wrist,
would fly to bring back
from the blue of the sky, to her, bleeding, a prize,
where I dream in my little hood with many bells
jangling when I'd turn my head.

My mother would be a falconress,
and she sends me as far as her will goes.
She lets me ride to the end of her curb
where I fall back in anguish.
I dread that she will cast me away,
for I fall, I mis-take, I fail in her mission.

She would bring down the little birds.
And I would bring down the little birds.
When will she let me bring down the little birds,
pierced from their flight with their necks broken,
their heads like flowers limp from the stem? (1–17)

Again and again in this poem narration in the stanzas takes the same shape, moving through the description of flight and then falling into the language of constraint. And each of the first twelve stanzas, all between three and eight lines

long, re-enacts this drama of failed escape in its language until, in the thirteenth stanza, the frame of reference for the story is suddenly changed:

> My mother would be a falconress,
> and even now, years after this,
> when the wounds I left her had surely heald,
> and the woman is dead... (63–66)

The image of succumbing to an external constraint which emerged at the end of the previous stanzas breaks off, formally and lexically, into a new dimension of insight in the last words of the poem:

> her fierce eyes closed, and if her heart
> were broken, it is stilled .
>
> I would be a falcon and go free.
> I tread her wrist and wear the hood,
> talking to myself, and would draw blood. (67–71)

A dramatic phrase of four words—"the woman is dead"—has cut the poem loose from its repetitive patterns of flight and constraint, closing this poem in words that make a striking transformation of the problematic phrase with which the poem began. From the perspective of Duncan's urge for the transformative phrase, *my mother would be a falconress* and *the woman is dead* have three telling similarities: they are sentences with a single subject and a two-part verb phrase, the subject of both sentences is woman, and the verb of both sentences is a form of "to be." In a sense, the poem charts Duncan's own working toward the ability to get past the invented word "falconress" of the first sentence to speak the wish or recognition of the second, to go from the conditional or habitual past tense of "would" into "is" and at the same time introduce with shocking directness the combination of femininity and mortality that has lurked behind its dream-figure from the start.

Comparing this first-person visionary lyrical poem to the similar one of eleven years earlier, "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," it seems clear that Duncan's interest in writing to a moment of self-transformation remains. But the same shift in strategies for coming to this expressive moment of change that led him away from the *Structure of Rime* series and toward *Passages* can be seen at work in this later poem too. The change in Duncan's aim for this first-person poem is that he wants to use the structure of the poem to direct syntax in the service of expressing a transformed repetition. For whereas in the earlier poem the repetition of first words in a structure of lines led to a final sentence whose lexical changes within an established syntax embody an ideal of maturation into freedom, in this later poem the structure of stanzas which narrate a repeating

process of flight and constraint leads to a reworking of the phrase that had set the poem in motion. A network of relations is transformed by the phrase that emerges into the poem because the emergent phrase is itself a transformed repetition of an earlier phrase, a change that the stanza-structure of the poem invites and that becomes, as Duncan had suggested in his preface to the book, a "figure we had not seen in which the joining is clear where we are" (x). As Duncan's continuing to compile grammatically irreconcilable phrases after the "here" in "Tribal Memories" established a plurality of sentences toward which the poem was moving, and so complicated the relations among phrases around it, the shift from "mother" to "the woman," from habitual past to present, and from the invented word "falconress" to the blunt "dead" disrupts the arc-shaped energies of the previous stanzas, making clear in a closing figure the poem's lengthy revelation of the depths of its grief and rage.

Hegel's Hymn

These structural strategies for following syntactic parameters into language that could express some transformation in the self came into his poetics even as Duncan was becoming increasingly restless with the relation of selfhood to poetry. One relatively neglected creation of his next period of increasing dissatisfaction with the experience of the self, the notion of interrupted forms, I will discuss at the end of the essay. But before getting there, I want to offer Hegel's exploration of the language of self-transcendence from the beginning of the seventh chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the hymn. This notion of the hymn is germane to Duncan's work, not only because the presiding influence of the *Passages* poems came from Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods*, but because religious and liturgical analogies became recurrent in Duncan's writings on poetics in the second half of the 1960's, and often appeared in contexts where his urge for self-transcendence in poetry was most clearly stated. "The most real is given and we have fallen away," he wrote in the 1964 essay "Towards an Open Universe," "but the most real is in the falling revealing itself in what is happening. Between the god *in* the story and the god *of* the story, the form, the realization of what is happening, stirs the poet" (81). Writing is an occasion for merger with the divine through surrender of personal intention, Duncan had come fiercely to believe. By 1968, he could put the same point in *The Truth and Life of Myth* with undisguised zeal: "the poet understands the truth of the anguish of Christ's passion as a truth of poetic form" (76).

Hegel's discussion of conscience in the third and final section of the sixth chapter of the *Phenomenology* culminates in a scene he describes as the breaking

of the hard heart. It is a moment of personal transformation, in his rendering, as the mind which has listened to the conscience of another confess chooses not to hear as a beautiful soul, one who contrasts the beauty of his own soul with the penitent's wickedness, but rather to acknowledge that the selfishness of the other is also within himself. As three times before in Hegel's narrative, this emergence of identity where there had been difference is ultimately manifest in language, as the inward unity of two distinct forms of selfishness is expressed in what he calls the "reconciling *Yea*" (409). In this paradoxical utterance of identification with an alien selfishness, Hegel's narration of the development of the self through three phases of reconstruction has literally gone as far as it can. For what has been transformed in the recognition of another's confession as an aspect of oneself is not simply one's idea of what is significant about oneself but rather one's very notion of the constraints of selfhood. This moment of mutual speaking of an affirming, reconciling word becomes no longer a moment of self-transformation but rather of self-transcendence, in which the dialectic can no longer take otherness into the circumference of the self but through which consciousness seems to reach past selfhood to its creative source. As Hegel puts this:

> The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical *existence,* is the *existence* of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge. (409; original italics)

This externalization through words of an intuited identity with an antithetical form of selfhood—effectively through speech making the desire of another one's own—is not only the omega in spirit's secular development but, in Hegel's view, the alpha of a religious consciousness, the language of an immediate knowledge of God.

The shift from looking at the forms of selfhood progressively expanded by grappling with and incorporating otherness to exploring forms of consciousness larger than any individual self—the shift from the sixth chapter, "Spirit," to the seventh chapter, "Religion"—comes three quarters of the way through Hegel's book. He is moving toward the pinnacle of his dialectic of consciousness in what he calls in the eighth chapter "Absolute Knowledge," a mode of thinking in which there can be no more dialectical steps because there is no longer any distinction between the knower and the object of knowledge. This shift from spirit to religion leaves no further development for the self, since Hegel understands religion as a phase in which consciousness only owns selfhood through its connection to a creative power which resides in an object of its thought. Religion is a perpetually

foreign realm to the self because it is a realm of understanding in which the self recognizes in the objects it perceives emblems of the force which created it and the world around it:

> The self-knowing Spirit is, in religion, immediately its own pure self-consciousness. Those forms of it which have been considered [in the sixth chapter], viz. the true Spirit, the self-alienated Spirit, and the Spirit that is certain of itself, together constitute Spirit in its *consciousness* which, confronting its *world*, does not recognize itself therein. But in conscience it brings itself, as well as its objective world in general, into subjection, as also its picture-thinking [i.e. mental representations] and its specific Notions, and is now a self-consciousness that communes with its own self. In this, Spirit conceived as object, has for itself the significance of being the universal Spirit that contains within itself all essence and all actuality; yet it is not in the form of free actuality or the apparent independence of Nature. (411; original italics)

In its reconciling yea, consciousness has found a voice which can speak not in contrast with the objective world but through it, conveying a force that leads this consciousness to seek out objects in which to find the ultimate creative source of that word reflected.

The arguments which follow from this description of religion offer a handful of ways in which language works in the service of this objectified source of inner reality—the oracle, the epic, comedy and tragedy—each of which involves an externalization that carries the narrative of spirit further than we will track it. But there is in the first moment of language in the realm of religion a particularly archaic kind of objectified self-transcendence which resonates with Duncan's poetics. Hegel calls this transcendent voice the language of the hymn.

Most important for recognizing how the hymn is to be distinguished from the language of the phases of the self discussed in the preceding sections of Hegel's work is to understand where it emerges in the course of the development of the religious consciousness. For the hymn is a model of speech whose emergence is initially described in terms of the progression of religious fascinations from nature to art:

> The first reality of Spirit is the Notion of religion itself, or religion as *immediate*, and therefore Natural Religion. In this, Spirit knows itself as its object in a natural or immediate shape. The second reality, however, is necessarily that in which Spirit knows itself in the shape of a *superceded* natural existence, or of the self. This, therefore, is the Religion of Art; for the shape raises itself to the form of the self through the creative activity of consciousness whereby this beholds in its object its act or the self. (416; original italics)

The worship of art, in Hegel's view, is a more profound understanding of the source of the self than the worship of nature because only in art can the self's independence from the non-sentient matter in which it lives be reflected back to it. Only in those forms of religious consciousness that contemplate objects the mind has mediated can the intelligence that created the self be found and worshipped.

In Hegel's view, the shift away from a religion of nature to a religion of art begins with depictions of animals and graduates into the making of statues of gods. These progressions move consciousness in the direction of finding before it the transcendent source of its own selfhood, and yet, Hegel notes repeatedly, what these human-made representations of the human shape cannot reflect back is the particularity, the individuality, of the mind which would worship them because the maker of these artworks will never find in them the source of his creativity, his innermost self, reflected back to him. However much self-transcendence is fostered by the worship of a sculptural totem of the human form, what still cannot be dissolved in this contemplation is the worshipper's inwardness, which does not find reflected there the source of its own urge for self-expression.

Hegel argues throughout the *Phenomenology* that the only vehicle through which the self's particularity can become the source of a new depth of identification is language. The analogous moment of this rescue of the dialectic by language in the seventh chapter, however, is complicated by the crucially non-human source of the inwardness to be expressed, a wrinkle which inflects and resolves itself in Hegel's narration of how the mute statue leads to the hymn. At first, in Hegel's view, the statue becomes religiously central but still leaves a margin of alienation where the inexpressive separateness of its physical body leaves nothing for the expressive dimensions of the psyche which created it to identify with:

> The artist, then, learns in his work that he did not produce a being *like himself*. From it, it is true, there comes back to him a consciousness in the sense that an admiring crowd reveres it as the Spirit which is their own essence. But this inspiration, since it returns to him his self-consciousness only as admiration, is rather a confession to the artist that the inspired work is not on the same level as himself[.] (429; original italics)

Only at this point of intensified awareness of the aspect of selfhood which still cannot be found in the transcendent object does language become the appropriate medium of the religious consciousness, satisfying a particular demand for an externalization of the most deeply inward:

> The work of art therefore demands another element of its existence, the god another mode of coming forth than this, in which, out of the depths of his creative night, he descends into the opposite, into externality, into the

> determination of the Thing which lacks self-consciousness. This higher element is Language—an outer reality that is immediately self-conscious existence. Just as the *individual* self-consciousness is *immediately* present in language, so it is also immediately present as a *universal* infection; the complete separation into independent selves is at the same time the fluidity and the universally communicated unity of the many selves; language is the soul existing as soul. (429–430; original italics)

Language has become the medium in which the essence of the soul can be manifest, because through words that force which has created the self steps "out of the depths of his creative night" and becomes expressive of precisely the kind of particularity it created when it made the artist's mind.

Hegel shifts paradigms for religious art from the statute to the hymn, then, in order to convey what it means for the creative self to come into contact with its creator by merging in a moment of expression. When a god takes language for his shape, the very act by which he created the human individual, long cloaked by worship of mute forms, re-enters time. By joining in speaking the hymn's patterns of words that have been inspired by a transcendent force, the individual self becomes reconceived as the self-consciousness of a god:

> The god, therefore, who has language for the element of his shape is the work of art that is in its own self inspired, that possesses immediately in its outer existence the pure activity which, when it existed as a Thing, was in contrast to it. In other words, self-consciousness, in the objectification of its essence, abides immediately with itself. Abiding thus with itself in its essence, it is *pure thought*, or the devotion whose *inwardness* in the hymn has at the same time an *outer* existence. (430; original italics)

From here, in Hegel's narration, there can be no return to the kinds of self-consciousness he had discussed in the sixth chapter, all of which depended on understanding oneself in terms of new and exemplary principles. The self has been dissolved into a more-than-human field, has merged with a force far beyond itself, and has spoken with its transcendent voice.

Hegel calls the understanding from which one speaks the hymn devotion, and hears in it the access of consciousness to the ground of being. Such a kind of speech is the first of a progression of kinds of religious language in the seventh chapter, each of which depends on an enlarging identification with some source of consciousness outside the self. As the first language of self-transcendence, the hymn is an event of passionate absorption in which the separation between self-consciousness and consciousness of the world disappears. The hymn is the language of a world in which desire is redundant. For the same merger by which

individuation has been overcome leads the devout consciousness to the recognition that it speaks with the voice of a mind for which all phenomena are a manifestation of its internal life.

Syntax and Self-Transcendence

I want in the closing pages of this essay to argue that the break from a language of self-transformation to a language of self-transcendence in the beginning of the seventh chapter of the *Phenomenology* parallels a shift in Robert Duncan's poetics in the late 1960s. The point I want to establish here is that after the publication of *The Bending of the Bow* Duncan began to ask syntax to work not in the service of satisfying a desire for transformation but to help him speak from a place transcending desire, to help him write from beyond selfhood. In Duncan's notion of interrupted forms, a conception of poetics born out of a 1973 poem by that name, one can see the emergence of such a new notion of poetic structure—for the purpose of the structure of "Interrupted Forms" is not to lead syntax to the realization of a transforming sentence or phrase but rather to show how underlying Duncan's self-expression in language is the creative force of grammatical expectation, the latent power of syntax that makes meaning possible. Like Hegel's notion of a self-transcending identification with the source of all being in the devout speaking of the hymn, the first person of Duncan's "Interrupted Forms" speaks from beyond the self because his words are no longer controlled by any demand he could make on syntax to help him explore the truth of himself. Rather the structure of the poem positions the voice which speaks inside of it so that its language seems controlled by the autonomous force with which language incessantly and inevitably makes, unmakes and re-makes meaning. Such a discovery about the power of poetic structure to re-frame the experience of syntax is what I mean to explore in what is left of this essay.

Shortly after the publication of *The Bending of the Bow*, and partly in response to what he took to be a vicious attack by the renowned critic M.L. Rosenthal, Duncan declared that he would not publish another book of poems for the next fifteen years. He kept his word. But over that same span he continued to write poems in sequences, many of which were ultimately published in his subsequent 1985 book, *Ground Work: Before the War*. Diverse as his output over this period was—including new poems in both the *Structure of Rime* and the *Passages* sequences—Duncan considered his most experimental, forward-looking work over that period to constitute a break away from his earlier notion of poetic structure and toward what he understood as a discrete new idea about poetics. In a 1974 reading of his long sequence "The Dante Études," already more than half a decade

into his self-imposed exile from publication, Duncan described the current thrust of his poetics this way: "Everything I've been writing since *Bending the Bow* has been essentially 'interrupted forms'" (1974).

The poem that gives this line of exploration its name comes not from "The Dante Études," however, but a frontispiece to a 1973 sequence, "Poems from the Margins of Thom Gunn's *Moly*." It is a distinctive poem in a number of ways. As Gunn himself remarks in a 1979 essay about Duncan's poetry, "Interrupted Forms" is particularly noteworthy for the way "the energy of the poem hovers between hesitations, much as a ghost hovers between being and non-being" (134). The poem, moreover, sits in a striking continuity with "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" and "My Mother Would Be a Falconress" because of the way that hovering energy plays through a steady first-person perspective. But most noteworthy about this poem in the context of Duncan's developing poetics is the way its structure is designed not to harness the syntactic energies within the work to self-transformation but rather to let them refuse the writing mind's introspective purposes, to cut against the measures of line, sentence and paragraph by which Duncan sought in earlier first-person poems to rein in syntactic energy for the enactment of self-transformation.

As Gunn's brief description makes clear, "Interrupted Forms" is a love poem, and perhaps an elegy, lonesome, passed through by a ghost. Yet most provocative about the work is the way the relation between the poem's syntax and its formal structures repeatedly express our own sense as listeners of our apparently instinctual commitment to grammatical relations among words. For the shape of the poem, a sequence of sentences running across lines which are held into two fifteen-line verse paragraphs, promises an experience of grammatical coherence that its run-on sentences frustrate—a frustration from which its line breaks misleadingly hint at relief. The poem starts:

> Long slumbering, often coming forward,
> haunting the house I am the house I live in
> resembles so, does he recall me or I
> recall him? (1–4)

Understanding what Duncan's question is asking requires taking measure of these lines' ductile intelligence. The second line embeds one modifying phrase within the third modifying phrase of a sentence which has yet to come to its subject (as it turns out, "the house I live in" modifies "the house I am," which is itself an element of the third participial phrase which begins "haunting," which modifies in turn a subject we don't know yet, "he"). But because Duncan has suppressed the relative pronoun "which" between "the house I am" and "the house I live in," the mind, resting at the break at the end of the second line to sort out a sen-

tence of overtaxing complexity, tries to make a subject of the second consecutive noun phrase, "the house I live in," imagining a caesura where there is not one, between the second line's "am" and "the." The beginning of the third line eliminates this as a possible reading, completing the sense of the third modifying phrase and then beginning main clause of the sentence, the question: "does he recall me or I"?

At this point we have been caught by the momentum of the poem's syntax feeling perhaps too-willfully invested in grammaticality, and then let a little off the hook. But one puzzle has been replaced with another. The subject of this question must be "he," and cannot be the other subject pronoun, "I," because "or" cannot permit the two subjects to share the predicate in parallel construction, since they require different forms of the verb "to do." Only the third person form of the verb, "does," is here. So "me" or "I" must both be objects of the verb "recall," not as pronouns but as actual objects. An important new use of syntax for Duncan is expressed in this impossible choice: the promise of coherence made by this poem's paragraph shape has us so trusting that it will be intelligible that we must treat words not as elements in a grammatical code but as unsatisfying substitutes for the man this poem seeks. And in this context the fourth line, the conclusion to the sentence, resolves nothing except our sense that the whole construction is, as we have begun to suspect with uneasy assent, ungrammatical.

The beginning of the seventh chapter of the *Phenomenology* can help us to see how placing line breaks within a verse-paragraph structure so as to tantalize a reader with his own grammatical expectations could be a breakthrough for Duncan. For he has stopped asking syntax to guide him to a self-expressive and self-transformative utterance—as he had in two of his most powerful first-person poems—and instead he has begun to imagine a poem's shape around the question of how he might best exemplify the way that syntax inevitably creates meaning. The first-person of this poem speaks in a way analogous to the devout speaker in Hegel's notion of the hymn because his words get their meaning not from what they express about Duncan's psyche but because of the latent powers of meaning-making in the language to which he has surrendered himself. His voice is identified not simply with the grammatically incoherent confessions that the words of the poem convey but, more profoundly, with the transpersonal processes of meaningfulness that guide this searchingly expressive speech.

The difficulties of "Interrupted Forms" catch the mind assuming and then hoping that its words capture reality, an assumption invited by the shape of the poem and frustrated by the ruptures of its syntax. Duncan draws out our experience of our own investment in sense to make us aware of the extent to which language speaks through us. The poem offers a form of self-transcen-

dence that is only available because of the way its words transgress its structural assurance of coherence. The penultimate sentence of the poem reads:

> In dreams
> insubstantially you have come before my eyes'
> expectations, and, even in waking,
> taking of the field of sight fleetingly
> stronger than what my eyes see,
> the thought of you thought has eyes to see
> has eyes to meet your answering eyes
> thought raises. (16–23)

There is simply no way to turn this into a grammatical statement. We can make it to the line "the thought of you thought has eyes to see / has eyes to meet" before losing any thread, abandoned among its echoes. And Duncan seems to want to force our attention to this moment where grammaticality collapses, since giving "the thought of you thought" its own eyes to see turns the event of imagining the beloved into a moment in which his otherness resists being absorbed into thought, slipping away from its status as an abstraction from an abstraction and becoming instead an agent, defined by its own visual relation to the world. And indeed this thought, Duncan continues, "has eyes to meet your answering eyes / thought raises." This two-word last line leaves us looking back into the phrase that precedes it for an object. To raise, unlike to rise, is a transitive verb. But grammatically there is no object readily available. There are only "eyes to meet your answering eyes," a vividly descriptive phrase whose syntactical isolation captures the loneliness it names in a way that is apt for this love elegy and powerfully new for the poetic tradition out of which this poem is writing. And so Duncan's later poetic thought raises that which it can perpetually never find, speaking a hymn to the sentence so implicit in syntax as to be beyond desiring.

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"For the Relief of the Body and the Reconstruction of the Mind": Adrienne Rich's Metamorphoses

Abstract: By looking at Adrienne Rich's poetic and political transitions, this article attempts to demonstrate how her politics of location galvanized her into writing a "whole new poetry." The source of its newness lies, however, not so much in avant-gardist formal experimentation, but rather in its rootedness in the complexities of lived corporeal experience.It is the body that emerges in Rich's later writingas a primary form of the subject's locatedness – the "geography closest in." Importantly, she views the body as a site of potentiality rather than a passive surface of sociopolitical inscriptions, and refers to corporeal materiality without falling into the trap of naïve essentialism. As I argue, such conceptualization of the body makes Rich's workparticularly interesting from the neo-materialist perspective.

Keywords: corporeality, politics, tradition, locatedness, difference, voice, nomad, matter, nature-culture, neo-materialism, Adrienne Rich

> Begin, we said, with the material, with matter, mma, madre, mutter, moeder, modder, etc., etc.
> – Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location"

> I want to reassert my bodily brand of materialism and remain to the end proud to be flesh!
> – Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*

In his reply to Ralph Waldo Emerson's congratulatory letter praising *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman, the poet-prophet, regretfully observed that until then "the body of a man or woman, the main matter" had been "quite unexpressed in poems," but concluded that "the body [was] to be expressed, and sex [was]" (*Selected Poems* 171). Although his prophecy was eventually fulfilled, the body had long been "driven to skulk out of literature" (171) and it took some time

before subsequent generations of North American poets began to "remove the veil" and transfigure what Whitman referred to as "forbidden voices / voices of sexes and lusts" (34). Surprising though it may seem, among the first explorers of that uncharted territory were the historical avant-garde women poets, whose corporeal writing constitutes, as many critics now argue, an alternative tradition to the highbrow modernist aesthetics.[1] Equally turbulent, fleshy and sensual as the quintessential American bard were also the Beat Generation poets, who came into prominence in the mid-1950s, throwing off the shackles of post-war conformity and rejecting the formalist aesthetics favored by the New Critics.

Not long before Allen Ginsberg published his legendary "Howl," Adrienne Rich, a twenty-one-year-old Radcliffe graduate, learned that her debut poetry collection *A Change of World* (1951) had been selected for publication as part of the Yale Series of Younger Poets. Unlike the Beats, Rich diligently followed New Criticism's strategies, winning the attention of W.H. Auden, who praised her verse for craftsmanship, impersonal tone and adherence to the rules of decorum (278). Regrettably, the story fits squarely into an all-too-familiar scenario—a renowned poet and critic champions the works of his young protégé at the Debutante's Poetry Ball, endorsing her "capacity for detachment from the self and its emotions," considered tantamount to the possibility of creating art as such (278). In that regard, Auden treaded in the footsteps of his modernist predecessors, Pound and Eliot, whose critical acclaim helped to pave the way for Loy's and Moore's "mind cry."[2] It is noteworthy that in his editor's foreword to *A Change of World*, Auden did not only express a favorable judgment of Rich's verse, but also offered a more general observation concerning the status of poetry in the post-war world. Regardless of the undeniable lure of the "making it new" era, the postwar generations of poets should, in Auden's view, endeavor to curb the desire to be "original" since novelty in art is necessarily preconditioned by the revolutionary spirit of the times a person lives in, and those times were gone:

1 See, for instance, Alex Goody, *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For a discussion of both historical and neo-avant-garde movements, see Elizabeth Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003).

2 In the March 1918 issue of *The Little Review*, Pound famously coined the term *logopoeia*, the poetry "akin to nothing but language," to describe the verse of two debutantes: Mina Loy and Marianne Moore. Pound regarded emotional detachment as a distinctive feature of their early works: "In the verse of Marianne Moore I detect traces of emotion; in that of Mina Loy I detect no emotion whatever.… It is a mind cry, more than a heart cry." See Ezra Pound, "Others." *The Little Review* (March, 1918) rpt. in *The Little Review Anthology*, ed. Margaret Anderson (New York: Hermitage House, 1953).

> Radical changes and significant novelty in artistic style can only occur when there has been a radical change in human sensibility to require them. The spectacular events of the present time must not blind us to the fact that we are living not at the beginning but in the middle of a historical epoch; they are not novel but repetitions on a vastly enlarged scale and at a violently accelerated tempo of events that took place long since.… Every poet under fifty-five cherishes, I suspect, a secret grudge against Providence for not getting him born a little earlier. (277)

What therefore emerges as a desirable quality in every poet is the capacity to "follow in their [predecessors'] tradition," which should not be considered synonymous with "parrot-like imitation" (278). The poet must accept the fact that he or she happened to live and create in a transitory period and before another "crop of revolutionary artists" enters the stage, there needs to be a yet another cultural revolution (277). Not endowed with such prophetic prowess as Whitman's, Auden could not have "prophesized with his pen" that his modest and soft-spoken protégé, a "dutiful daughter" of the New Critics, would soon become one of the most radical and uncompromising poets of the postmodern era. He also could not have anticipated the extent to which such "spectacular events" as the upcoming Vietnam War, the elevated tensions of the Cold War, or the emergence of the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements would influence Rich's poetic consciousness, galvanizing her to flout the New Critical doctrine and follow in Whitman's rather than the great modernists' footsteps.

In her 1993 essay, quite tellingly titled "Not How to Write Poetry, but Wherefore," Rich re-visits the works of her "Masters," admitting that she has long borne a grudge against Auden particularly because he "proclaimed such a limited scope for poetry, including [hers]" (*What Is Found* 191). Reflecting on the following lines from his 1939 elegy for Yeats: "poetry makes nothing happen; it survives / In the valley of its saying where executives / Would never want to tamper" (qtd. in Rich, *What Is Found* 192), she emphasizes that in the post-war world in which she grew up, the executives were, as a matter of fact, "increasingly tampering with everything" and "both poetry and women were being re-domesticated" (193). Although Rich was not yet familiar with the twentieth-century radical and revolutionary poetic tradition, she began to resist the idea of poetry as self-contained, dissociated from sociopolitical praxis and lacking destabilizing force. The poetry she imagined was rather "liberatory at its core"—"[not] revolution itself, but 'a way of knowing / why it must come'" (*Arts* 117).

The revolutionary mood notwithstanding, Rich's metamorphosis from "[t]he faithful drudging child / the child at the oak desk whose penmanship / hard work, style will win her prizes" to "the woman with a mission, not to win prizes / but to change the laws of history" (*Poetry and Prose* 112) was not smooth and

unproblematic. On the contrary, when looking at Rich's life and career trajectories, it can be noticed how painstakingly difficult it was for her to find, however clichéd it may sound, her distinct poetic voice. Her subsequent volume, *The Diamond Cutters* (1955), was published soon after she got married and gave birth to the first of her three sons. The poems included in the collection failed to reflect Rich's "will to change," but successfully evoked the anti-revolutionary spirit of the fifties, infused with "the feminine mystique." As Randal Jarrell interestingly observed in his review, Rich could "afford to be wild [one day]," but for the time being she "deserve[d] Shakespeare's favorite adjective, *sweet*" (129). The beginnings of Rich's metamorphosis are, however, vividly rendered in her third collection titled *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963). In this volume, referred to by Albert Gelpi as "transitional" (285), Rich changes the tone, somewhat sarcastically depicting social roles and pressures imposed on the eponymous daughter-in-law, who—feeling utterly overwhelmed and disempowered—lapses into lethargy. Looking back at her own development as a woman, Rich admits that when she was writing about "[a] young girl, thought sleeping, [but] certified dead," she described herself at that time (*Poetry and Prose* 173).

What awakened her from lethargy were the events of 1968 connected with a growing awareness that "the times they [were] a-changin" and the cultural revolution was inevitable. Rich's "will to change" manifested itself in her active involvement in the anti-war, civil rights and feminist movements. She joined the ranks of activists who had already been grouped by Ronald Reagan under the umbrella terms "beatniks, radicals and filthy speech advocates."[3] Given the circumstances, Rich started to redefine the relations between art and politics, assuming an avowedly critical stance towards modernist legacy, including its emphasis on impersonality and detachment.[4] As Charles Altieri observes in his study of American poetry after modernism, Rich "manifestly refuses modernist ideals of impersonality so that she can take clear personal political stances and,

3 These words were used by Ronald Reagan in his 1966 campaign speech for Governor of California, in which he strongly criticized radical campus activism. He referred specifically to student protests at the University of California at Berkeley. See, for instance, Andrew L. Johns, ed., *A Companion to Ronald Reagan* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 2015).

4 It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss Rich's conceptualization of modernism, but it needs to be underlined that she absorbed the idea of modernism from the New Critics and her rejection of formalist aesthetics was therefore coupled with the rejection of modernist legacy. She viewed modernism as a monolith rather than heterogeneous movement with different undercurrents, and was skeptical towards the revolutionary potential of the historical avant-garde movements. See Rich's polemics with Paul Goodman, "Format and Form," *What Is Found There. Notebooks on Poetry and Politics,* 217–227.

more important, she can utilize every resource of spoken language in order to persuade her audience to share her values" (172). She also opposed a prevailing view that art and politics are "poor bedfellows" and that the poet should avoid "grind[ing] a political axe" since political writing is by definition "bad, impotent [and] lacking in breadth"—"The song is higher than the struggle, and the artist must choose between politics—here defined as earthbound factionalism, corrupt power struggles—and art, which exists on some transcendental plane" (*Arts* 52–53). What she regarded as inadequate was the definition of the word "politics" itself, trivialized by the rhetoric of the 1950s and reduced to the government and Cold War struggles: "the Red Menace, Jewish Plots, spies, malcontents conspiring to overthrow democracy, 'outside agitator' stirring up perfectly contented Black and/or working people" (52–53). Instead, she proposed a broader definition of politics understood as inseparably connected with the effort to "find ways of humanely dealing with each other" and "break down [the] barriers of oppression" (*What is Found* 24–25). Rich's vision, which focused on the ethical and personal dimension of politics was evocatively expressed in the frequently quoted lines: "The moment when a feeling enters the body—is political. This touch is political" (24).

The reclamation of feelings, language and the body emerges as a central theme in Rich's later works, which epitomize the idea of making poetry "not *about* but *out of*" [Rich's emphasis] political experience. In contrast to the New Critics, Rich dreamed of expanding the space for poetry and making it an integral part of people's lives—as necessary as "food, shelter, health, education [or] decent working conditions" (*What Is Found* xiv). In the poem titled "Transcendental Etude" (1978), she addresses some of the problems central to the second-wave women's liberation movement: the importance of consciousness-raising and the power of female bonding. "No one ever told us we had to study our lives, / make of our lives a study/ as if learning natural history / or music" (*Poetry and Prose* 87), observes the speaker, emphasizing the value of self-knowledge as a prerequisite for change. Although "the cutting away of an old force that held [us] rooted to an old ground" (89) and "pulling back from "rhythms we've moved to thoughtlessly" might seem frightful, it constitutes a precondition of freedom:

> But there come times—perhaps this is one of them—
> when we have to take ourselves more seriously or die;
> when we have to pull back from incantations,
> rhythms we've moved to thoughtlessly,
> and disenthrall ourselves… (*Poetry and Prose* 88–89)

A feeling of interconnectedness, which also encompasses the mother-daughter bond and erotic relationships between women, emerges in Rich's poetry as empowering and endowed with the potential to open up the space for "a whole

new poetry," a poetry which would not pertain to "lofty and privileged abstraction" (*Arts* 65), but would be rooted in "the musing of [the] mind one with [the] body" (*Poetry and Prose* 90). Importantly, "a whole new," as understood by Rich, does not stand for 'experimental' in terms of form (by the seventies free verse had already become a fossilized convention) or 'innovative' in the avant-gardist sense of the word. Consistently skeptical about the revolutionary potential of the avant-garde—somewhat reductively identified with predominately male modernist movements—Rich held the view that "what really matters is not line lengths or the way meter is handled, but the poet's voice and concerns refusing to be circumscribed or colonized by the tradition, the tradition being just a point of takeoff" (*What Is Found* 225). Building on Paul Goodman's form/format bifurcation, Rich argues that most traditional poetic forms, such as sonnet, might be successfully turned into new poetry, a carrier of radical consciousness, on condition that the poet manages to claim his or her personal space, "struggl[ing] not to let the form lapse into format," which is tantamount to "broken-spirited" or "colonized" speech (*What Is Found* 218–219). The dynamics of such a struggle might produce compelling effects—"a movement, a music, of its own" (219), which manifested itself, for instance, in Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die."[5] For Rich "a whole new poetry" began not when she only refused to be circumscribed by what she considered a modernist tradition, but when she discovered that the point of takeoff, the ground from which she can voice her radical consciousness, the place where her "will to change" begins, is the body—the female body, the desiring body, the body in pain, the ageing body, the politicized body, the damaged body, and most importantly, *her* body. A whole new poetry began when she distanced herself from the abstract and turned to the corporeal.

In her 1983 essay *Blood, Bread and Poetry: The Location of the Poet*, Rich admitted that what she was "hungering" to do all her writing life was "[to] write directly and overtly as a woman, out of woman's body and experience, to take women's existence seriously as theme and source of art" (*Arts* 56). Such a confession made by a North American feminist poet might have seemed "out of line," especially when set against the backdrop of the essentialist /constructivist dispute which shaped feminist criticism in the 1980s. Since Anglo-American gender theories had been already heavily relying on the social constructivist paradigm, which successfully counterbalanced naturalistic perspectives on the woman's body, any references to the biological roots of the female body tended to be prematurely dismissed on the grounds of their alleged essentialism. For this exact reason, Luce Irigaray's *écriture feminine* met with a rather frosty reception in the US. Elaine

5 Some of the modernist woman poets also turned old forms into new poetry. See, for instance, Edna St. Vincent Millay's "The Ballad of the Harp-Weaver" and her sonnets.

Showalter claimed, for instance, that "simply to invoke anatomy risks a return to the crude essentialism" (17), whereas Nancy K. Miller asserted that it is in the "body of [the woman's] writing and not the writing of [the woman's] body" where a "woman-text" must be sought (271).[6] More than a decade later, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank critically observed that contemporary theory, considered "a broad project that now spans humanities and extends into history and anthropology" is inherently anti-essentialist and anti-biologist: "The distance of any such accounts from a biological basis is assumed to correlate near-precisely with its potential for doing justice to difference (individual, historical and cross cultural), to contingency, to performative force and to the possibility of change" (1). Even the word "nature" itself has been frowned upon since "theory has become almost simply coextensive with the claim it's not *natural*" (16; original emphasis).

Given the above, Rich's conceptualization of the body as irreducible to a discursively constructed product of power relations, might have been also dismissively labeled as essentialist back in the 1980s or 90s. Nonetheless, in light of the recently observed "corporeal turn" in the humanities and the emergence of neo-materialist perspectives on the body, Rich's corporeal writing gains in importance and originality. Moreover, given the extent to which her "politics of location" and her approach towards corporeal materiality influenced Rosi Braidotti's theory, it might be argued that she proves to be one of the foremothers of the neo-materialist thought defined as "a method, a conceptual frame and a political stand, which refuses the linguistic paradigm, stressing instead the concrete yet complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power" (Braidotti, *New Materialism* 21).

While social constructivist perspectives reinforced the nature/culture divide, moving the feminist theory away both from nature and the body, neo-materialist approaches aim at overcoming the essentialist/constructivist impasse by rethinking nature-culture as a continuum rather than unbridgeable gap (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* ch. 2). Rich's earliest attempts at thinking mind and matter in a non-dichotomous way are documented in the collection *Necessities of Life* (1966). In the poem titled "In the Woods," the speaker recounts how she, in a Thoreau-like fashion, tended to turn her disembodied consciousness to Nature, contained in the image of "the old pond with the half-drowned boat" and conceived of as "ego's Arcady," to seek consolation:

6 For an extensive overview of the essentialist/constructivist dispute see Diane Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

My soul, my helicopter, whirred
distantly, by old habit, over
the old pond with the half drowned boat
toward which it always veers
for consolation: ego's Arcady:
leaving the body stuck
like a leaf against a screen. (*Poetry and Prose* 21)

Yet no consolation had been found until the day came when her body was not "[left stuck] like a leaf against a screen," but became one with her soul, "[her] helicopter," evoking feelings of interconnectedness with the world of matter, the feelings which brought the utmost joy:

this time: my soul wheeled back
and burst into my body.
Found! Ready or not.
If I move now, the sun
naked between the trees
will melt me as I lie. (*Poetry and Prose* 21)

The body into which the speaker's soul so joyfully "bursts" emerges in Rich's later works as reducible neither to Cartesian *res extensa*, the inert mass devoid of any potentiality, nor Butler's *body that matters*, an effect of representation. It is rather conceptualized as processual and affective, close to Braidotti's idea of the body as "a transformer of flows and energies, affects, desires and imaginings," "a threshold of transformations," and "a surface of intensities" (*Nomadic Subjects* 24–25). When writing about the body, Rich the feminist focuses particularly on the female body, somewhat provocatively named by Braidotti as "a dark continent of feminist thought" (*Nomadic Subjects* 1994 180). Nevertheless, Rich's aim is not to "transcend" the female body, but to "reclaim" it, "[to] reconnect our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular living human individual, a woman" (*Arts* 65), which is evocatively rendered in her 1968 poem "Planetarium":

I am an instrument in the shape
of a woman trying to translate pulsations
into images for the relief of the body
and the reconstruction of the mind. (*Poetry and Prose* 39)

Trying to embrace the complexities of lived corporeal experience, Rich encourages women to "begin… with the material, with matter, mma, madre, mutter, moeder, modder, etc., etc." (*Arts* 65). She does not shy away from speaking the physicality of the female body, its "biological grounding," its "matter." However,

when referring to "the material," she also points to a number of variables which determine the concrete, sociopolitical positioning of the female subject, the "matter" of her existence. For Rich, just as for neo-materialist thinkers, the body constitutes "a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic and the sociological" (*Nomadic Subjects* 24–25). The question which permeates her works is whether the woman's body, which as she suggested, constitutes "the terrain on which patriarchy [was] erected" (*Of Woman Born* 55), can be affirmatively refigured:

> In arguing that we have by no means yet explored or understood our biological grounding, the miracle and paradox of the female body and its spiritual and political meanings, I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized – our great mental capacities, hardly used, our highly developed tactile sense, our genius for close observation; our complicated, pain-enduring, multi-pleasured physicality. (*Of Woman Born* 284)

Rich's call to "think through the body" and "connect what has been so cruelly disorganized" also corresponds to the corporeal feminist project of "refiguring the female body as positivity rather than lack " (Grosz 61), which draws on the Spinozist account of the body as a site of unexplored capacities.[7] Rich seems to reformulate the question posed by Spinoza focusing specifically on the female body and its affirmative capacities, its *potentia.* Her emphasis on sexual difference definitely situates her works closer to Braidotti's theory of the embodied and sexually differentiated subjectivity rather than Butler's perspective "beyond gender." While for Butler sexual difference seems to constitute a "problem to overcome," Braidotti theorizes it as "a situated corporeal location that one starts from" (*New Materialism* 29), and subcategorizes it into differences between women and men, differences among women, and differences within each real-life woman (*Nomadic Subjects* 151–158). These differences are also beautifully pictured in one of Rich's "Love Poems" (1974–76):

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7 In Spinoza's philosophy the mind and the body are regarded as attributes of the same, infinite and indivisible substance. The body is not represented as an inert mass subjugated to the mind. On the contrary, it becomes a reservoir of unexplored potentialities. As Spinoza states in the *Ethics*, "nobody as yet has determined the limits of the body's capabilities: that is, nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, without being determined by mind, solely from the laws of its nature insofar as it is considered as corporeal." (Spinoza, *Complete Works*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hacket, 2002, 280). For a discussion of Spinoza's influence on corporeal feminism, see Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

> But we have different voices even in sleep,
> and our bodies, so alike, are yet so different
> and the past echoing through our bloodstreams
> is freighted with different language, different meanings—
> though in any chronicle of the world we share
> it could be written with new meaning
> we were two lovers of one gender,
> we were two women of one generation. (*Common Language* 30–31)

It is worthy of note that within neo-materialist framework, a woman is not represented as a monolithic and unchanging essence, but rather as a subject-in-becoming, a nomad. The nomad, as theorized by Braidotti, stands for "[the] subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. [The subject] who expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes without an essential unity" (*Nomadic Subjects* 57). Moreover, Braidotti contends that "one speaks as a woman in order to empower women [and] to activate socio-symbolic changes in their condition, [which] is a radically anti-essentialist position" (*New Materialism* 34). By the same token, Rich argues that "women need to repossess their bodies as 'the grounds' from which to speak with authority as women" (*Arts* 65).

Although not fixed in one place, the nomad has a "sharpened sense of territory" (*Nomadic Subjects* 65), which makes her/him cognizant of different forms of her/his own locatedness. As Braidotti emphasizes, her nomadic thought evolved from the practice of "politics of location" (*New Materialism* 22), which was developed by Rich as an alternative to identity politics assumed by U.S. radical feminist movements back in the 1970s. Regardless of her commitment to women's liberation movement, Rich eventually became critical towards its polarizing tendencies and Western self-centeredness. Most importantly, she questioned the idea of identity politics, which regarded as universal the experience of white, middle-class, heterosexual women, locating other subject-positons in the periphery (*Blood, Bread* 219). In a self-critical tone she recounted her conference trip to Nicaragua, admitting that she "felt the absurdity of travelling to a four-year-old evolving U.S. beleaguered society, carrying in hand an agenda from U.S feminism to which that society [was expected] to answer or be written off" (157). In an attempt to de-Westernize North American feminism, Rich developed a politics, which highlighted the importance of each subject's "location," pertaining not only to his/her spatio-temporal situatedness, but encompassing such variables as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age or gender.

Since Rich herself came out of the closet in the seventies, the problem which emerged as central in her writing was the locatedness of lesbians. In her landmark essay titled "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980), she

critically observes that the erasure of lesbian experience also takes place within feminist movement and that "feminist research and theory that contributes to lesbian invisibility or marginality are actually working against the liberation and empowerment of women as a group" (*Blood, Bread* 50). She also objects to equating lesbian existence with male homosexuality, which shifts the attention away from the multifaceted experience of women (52), and postulates to study heterosexuality as a political institution in order to fight the systematic mystification of lesbian experience – "[a] bias of compulsory heterosexuality, through which lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible" (26). In an attempt to deconstruct different manifestations of compulsory heterosexuality, she draws the reader's attention to the control of women's consciousness through idealization of heterosexual marriage and romance. In her view, due to social and economic circumstances, women internalized the assumption that "marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable—even if unsatisfying or oppressive—components of their lives" since they serve as "social and economic protect[ion]" (39). Lesbians, who might challenge the status quo, can be tolerated on condition that they assume socially acceptable heterosexual roles, as it happened in the case of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, or remain in the closet performing publicly the role of "real" heterosexual women.

Rich coins two terms that refer to what might be described as lesbian experience: *lesbian existence* and *lesbian continuum*. The former refers to the historical presence of lesbians and fluid meanings ascribed to it, whereas the latter is related to woman-identified experience that encompasses a wide spectrum of relations between women, ranging from intimate bonding to political solidarity. Rich points out that female nurturing relationships, which have not necessarily been homoerotic, have always been part of social reality. There have always existed women who persistently resisted oppression and refused to remain powerless regardless of the fact that heteronormative behaviors were enforced on them. Drawing on Rosalind Petchesky's report on women and revolution, she argues that also those forms of women resistance which do not correspond to "concrete revolutionary situations" as defined in male culture (qtd. in Rich 57) should be studied as examples of radical rebellions. That includes such historical examples as the refusal of some women to have children, aided at great risk by other women, or marriage resistance (56–57).

While Rich anticipated that the concept of *lesbian continuum* might be misused and misinterpreted, she did not expect it to be considered a pamphlet replete with feminist clap-traps meant to encourage some "man-haters" to overthrow patriarchy through lesbian revolution. In "Reflections on Compulsory Heterosexuality" (1984), she explains that her aim was to problematize social

understandings of heterosexuality in the hope of contributing to future debates on sexuality and gender. Aware of the flaws of her attempt, she admits that the idea behind the concept of lesbian continuum was "to address the disconnect between heterosexually-identified and lesbian feminists," encourage solidarity and build a non-exclusive community of women who are differently located (*Blood, Bread* 67).

Before publishing the above-discussed essays, Rich had already transfigured the "forbidden voices" of lesbian desire in the sonnet-like sequence of "Twenty-One Love Poems" published as part of *The Dream of a Common Language* (1976). Its overarching theme is an erotic relationship between "two lovers of one gender," whose experience cannot be accommodated by the dominant discourse. The lovers are culturally invisible and deprived of the space to live and grow. Their experience remains unspeakable and unimaginable:

> No one has imagined us. We want to live like trees,
> sycamores blazing through the sulfuric air
> dappled with scars, still exuberantly budding
> our animal passion rooted in the city. (*Common Language* 25)

Although there is no space for lesbians within the structures of heterosexual society and they are forced to exist outside the law, they still find sustenance in their nurturing relationship: "a whole new poetry begins here." The speaker does not want to keep on "nursing, measuring [the old] wound," and cherishing her suffering (29). Affirmatively accepting her scars, she tells her beloved one: "I want to go on from here with you / fighting the temptation to make career of pain" (29). Walking through the city, where "screens flicker with pornography, with science fiction vampires, victimized hirelings bending to the lash" (25), the lovers find shelter in each other's embrace, which becomes their microcosm. They are "sleeping, turning in turn like planets / rotating in their midnight meadow" (30). Somewhere in the middle of the sequence, the reader comes across "(THE FLOATING POEM, UNNUMBERED)," which graphically evokes the erotic experience of lesbian lovers:

> Whatever happens with us, your body
> will haunt mine—tender, delicate
> your lovemaking, like the half-curled frond
> of the fiddlehead fern in forests
> just washed by sun. Your traveled, generous thighs
> between which my whole face has come and come—
> the innocence and wisdom of the place my tongue has found there—
> the live, insatiate dance of your nipples in my mouth—
> your touch on me, firm, protective, searching

me out, your strong tongue and slender fingers
reaching where I had been waiting for years for you
in my rose-wet cave—whatever happens, this is. (*Common Language* 32)

The bracketed, unnumbered poem is "floating" outside the ordered sequence, reminding us that lesbian experience cannot be incorporated into the rigid structures of heteronormative discourse and needs a new language, a new literature. A similar theme permeates Rich's 1976 essay "It Is the Lesbian in Us," in which she recounts how the novelist Bertha Harris perceives the effacement of the lesbian subject in literature: "The lesbian, without literature, is without life. Sometimes pornographic, sometimes a mark of fear, sometimes a sentimental flourish, she… *floats* in space… without the attachment to earth where growth is composed" (qtd. in Rich *Lies, Secrets and Silence* 200). Rich's "Twenty Love Poems" constitute one of the earliest attempts to flout the "bias of compulsory heterosexuality" and demystify lesbian experience as neither "deviant" nor "abhorrent" (*Blood, Bread* 26). What is expressed in the floating poem is passion, fondness and affection. "Whatever happens with us, your body / will haunt mine," declares the speaker, picturing her partner's lovemaking as "tender" and "delicate," "like the half-curled frond / of the fiddlehead fern in forests / just washed by sun." The imagery employed in the poem suggests harmony between lovers and pleasure they derive from caressing each other. The lover's touch on the speaker's body feels "firm" and "protective," her thighs are depicted as "generous" and the "dance of [her] nipples in the [speaker's] mouth" as "insatiate."

In her book on Rich's poetry and politics, Liz Yorke observes that the responses of the literary critics to Rich's lesbian poetry were ranging from "extreme hostility" to "mere ambivalence" (3). Still, at that time she had already been awarded the National Book Award for *Diving Into the Wreck* and the reception of her works was on the whole favorable. Proving to be "the woman with a mission, not to win prizes / but to change the laws of history," she became a star in the firmament of North American poetry, and was paradoxically showered with many prizes. It seems as if the literary establishment wanted to assimilate her work into the mainstream so that it could be contained and served as "a dish on a buffet table of 'entertainment'" (*What Is Found* 226). But Rich was equally consistent in her refusal to be tamed and turned into a token artist. When given the National Book Award, she demanded that her co-nominees Alice Walker and Audre Lorde enter the stage with her so that they could accept the prize together "in the name of all women." Although she remained overtly critical of the government, in 1997 she was awarded the National Medal for the Arts, a prize which she did not accept, famously declaring that "the very meaning of art, as [she] understand[s] it, is incompatible with the cynical politics of [Bill Clinton's] administration" and

that art "means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage" (*Arts* 98). Cognizant of the fact that „[p]oetry never stood a chance / of standing outside history" (*Poetry and Prose* 115), Rich accomplished her mission and during her lifetime proved that "tonight no poetry will serve."

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Małgorzata Poks

A New Great Awakening: The Tradition of Radical Christian Discipleship and the Current Transformational Moment in the United States

Abstract: This article argues that the USA has had a lasting tradition of radical Christian discipleship. The revival of interest in a radically understood socio-economic program of the Bible among the newly emerging intentional communities reflects the moral passion of the older faith-inspired reform movements that helped abolish slavery, introduce universal suffrage, and establish civil rights. The reformist goals of the radical Christian movement, sometimes hailed as another Great Awakening, resonate deeply with the demands of the Occupy Generation and its fundamental concern about values and identity. Like the young Occupiers, the faith-based activists for social justice challenge Americans to rethink who they are and who they want to be. Having defined the tradition of radical Christian discipleship, I then proceed to reclaim the legacy of two of its icons—Ammon Hennacy and Jim Corbett—as embodiments of two different facets of the phenomenon.

Keywords: radical Christian discipleship, justice, intentional communities of faith, Ammon Hennacy, Jim Corbett

In the first decade of the third millennium, evangelical activist Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners Magazine* and founder of the intentional Sojourners Community, famously declared: "the monologue of the religious right is over and a new dialogue has begun" (qtd. in Scanlon). In the 2008 presidential campaign Wallis and numerous other "Obamagelicals" enthusiastically supported Barack Obama's candidacy (Miller 157). Trying to dissociate faith-based activism from political partisanship that makes religion an adjunct of the state and hostage of political programs, Wallis, currently President Obama's spiritual advisor, has built a nondenominational movement within Christianity. No longer confined to political "right" or "left" or assigned to liberal-progressive / conservative wing in the political spectrum, the movement, in the words of its co-leader, Tony Campolo, consists, mostly though not exclusively, of evangelicals

> who are troubled by what is happening to poor people in America; who are disturbed over environmental policies that are contributing to global warming; who are dismayed over the increasing arrogance of power shown in our country's militarism; who are outraged because government funding is being reduced for schools where students, often from impoverished and dysfunctional homes, are testing poorly; who are upset with the fact that of the 22 industrialized nations America is next to last in the proportion of its national budget (less than two-tenths of 1 percent) that is designated to help the poor of third-world countries; and who are broken-hearted over discrimination against women, people of color, and those who suffer because of their sexual orientation. Because being evangelical is usually synonymous with being Republican in the popular mind, and calling ourselves 'progressive' might be taken as a value judgment by those who do share our views, we decided not to call ourselves 'progressive evangelicals.' We came up with a new name: Red-Letter Christians. ("What's a Red-Letter Christian?")

This name, a reference to those passages in the New Testament which are printed in red ink, signals a commitment to following the exact words of Jesus rather than worrying about dogmatic pronouncements and religious orthodoxy. In most evangelical Bibles the Sermon on the Mount is printed in red.

Red-Letter Christians are just one among dozens of newly emerging faith-based movements and communities that are rediscovering the radical socio-economic program of the Bible. Judging by the amount of discussion it generates on the internet, Christian radicalism—not to be confused with fundamentalism—has taken America by storm. This article is an attempt to document the existence and continuity of a largely ignored tradition of radical Christianity in the U.S. It also tries to spell out the political and cultural significance of its current renaissance for the new millennium.

In 1992, scholar of religion and philosophy Robert H. Craig announced the existence of an ignored, alternative tradition within American Christianity. In contrast to the dominant religious right, supportive of the political and economic *status quo* and viewed as representative of American Christianity as a whole, there have always been faith-inspired groups and individuals struggling for political and economic empowerment of the oppressed and the excluded. Although often at odds with official church doctrines, their transformative impact on American society is undeniable and should be reclaimed from the limbo of history. Long left out of the official history of American religions, groups of radical Christians belong among other formerly marginalized groups, like blacks or women, asserts Craig. Rendered invisible by dominant historical and ecclesiastical discourses, they were rarely allowed to speak for themselves; at best they were spoken for (Craig 2). The recovery of this repressed tradition as *tradition*

rather than a series of self-contained, inconsequential movements is of crucial importance if a more balanced vision of American society is to be achieved and if ordinary Americans are to become subjects of their own history.[1] "By telling the story of this country differently," writes Craig, "we are holding up a mirror in which we see ourselves differently" (231). Consequently, his book *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition* (1992) concentrates on those Americans who, empowered by the gospel stories, struggled for social and economic justice. Arguing that the stirrings of a new world order frequently come from within the religious consciousness, Craig's survey covers a century of radical Christian politics in the U.S., starting with the nineteenth-century Christian Labor Union and ending with Civil Rights activism and the politics of nonviolence.

In a history of religion and social movements in the U.S. published a decade later, Dan McKanan similarly insists that there *is* a radical religious tradition in North America. To illustrate the continuity of this tradition, the author presents the grandson of the nineteenth-century abolitionist and Christian anarchist William Lloyd Garrison as a co-founder of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and documents how that organization, together with the radical activist Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker movement, organized protests against civil defense drills in the 1950s and draft-card burning at the time of the Vietnam war. "The first man to go to prison for draft-card burning would later marry Starhawk," adds McKanan, drawing further continuities between 1960s faith-based peace activism and the recent radical ecofeminist politics of neopaganism (3). In his book of 1992 Craig concurred: "For those who believe that the system needs change, it is extremely important to know that they have predecessors, even a tradition, with which they can identify as Christians and as Americans" (8).

An important aspect of this tradition is its anti-imperial bent. Before the fourth century, the followers of Jesus Christ were considered enemies of the Roman empire. Constantine the Great, however, ended their persecution, and the resulting "Constantinian shift" brought the church and the state into alignment. Since then, Christianity has often been a tool in the expansion of worldly empires, sanctioning the existing political order, justifying the conduct of wars of defense, and supporting the executions decreed legal by the political system. Lee C. Camp, author of *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (2003), discusses wars during which Christian communities gave allegiance to power—like the American Civil War or the Rwandan War—as examples of the "ongoing effect of the Constantinian cataract" (212). The moment Caesar became

1 Within American historiography, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980) was a revolutionary attempt to present American history from the perspective of ordinary citizens. This book inspired similar attempts in other disciplines.

a member of the church, domination has become the central characteristic of the *locus imperi*, and redemptive violence—its dominant ethos, agrees Mennonite theologian Ched Myers (xxix). In his book subtitled *Discipleship Queries for First World Christians* (1994), the Los Angeles-based author claims:

> My country exports war against the poor around the world, covertly from Nicaragua to Mozambique and overtly from Grenada to Iraq. My city built its prosperity manufacturing the military tools of that trade (...). My country seeds a home-grown war against its own poor, from Miami to Watts and from the Rio Grande Valley to Akwasasne. My country cultivates the seeds of oppression every day in Florence and Normandie and Pico-Union — and has reaped the bitter fruit of its harvest twice in the last quarter century. (*Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* 5)

Myers's assessment: "I live in a war zone where violence is a way of life" (*Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* 5) leads to the logical conclusion that radical discipleship requires a dis-location from the *locus imperi* and a reestablishment of solidarity with the victims of imperial politics: the poor and the oppressed—the addressees of the good news of the gospel. As a third-generation Korean Presbyterian, pastor of the Church of All Nations from the Twin Cities puts it, the way out of the empire is by following the "penniless, homeless, disreputable, Palestinian Jew" (Kim 181). The founder of Christianity blessed the poor, the righteous, the meek, the peacemakers, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for which he was excommunicated from the synagogue and executed by the state. Radical discipleship, therefore, is concerned with orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy. Having exposed the socio-political roots of the imperial condition and having reclaimed love, nonviolence, and sustainability as the roots of their faith traditions, radical followers of the executed God[2] dedicate themselves to doing the truth (*facere veritatem*[3]) in the diverse contexts of their lives.

While unconditional love and nonviolence are radical Christian practices well-established in the biblical context,[4] sustainability, the least obvious of the three, is intimately connected with the Exodus story and the establishment of Sabbath as a time of rest from the accumulation of wealth. According to the

2 See Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

3 This concept, formulated by Augustine of Hippo in his *Confessions*, has become popularized by the weak theology of John Caputo. Jacques Derrida also used it in his *Circumfession* (1991).

4 "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:8); "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31); "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Matt. 5:39).

Book of Exodus, when the Hebrew people escaped from Egyptian bondage and wandered in the wilderness, God sent them manna every morning except Sabbath to sustain them on their way to the Promised Land.[5] The Israelites were instructed to gather enough manna for the day, neither too much, nor too little. Whatever was accumulated in excess of their immediate need would go bad the next morning. This story provides the basic coordinates of "sabbath" economics—the economy of sufficiency, which "stresses God's abundance and provision," as Matthew Colwell explains. "That abundance carries with it the accompanying instruction not to gather too much lest others go without" ("Practicing Sabbath Economics"). Still, in the contemporary world, where consumerism is the ethos of the day, the economy of sufficiency is practiced against the dominant model of "mammon" economy—the economy of excess and deprivation, which makes the elite one percent own ninety-nine percent of the world's total wealth.[6] Myers, who often applies the economic lens to biblical exegesis,[7] outlines the following blueprint for sabbath economics: "I suggest that Christians should advocate revisioning economics within the limits of the land; should recover the biblical wisdom of 'retribalizing' society through the anarchistic demand to decentralize power and decision-making; and should support a more bioregional politics of self-determination" (*Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* xxx).

These guidelines are being incorporated into the lifestyles of diverse radical communities of faith that locate themselves among the precariat and other people disenfranchised by recent forms of economic-racist exploitation. One such example would be the Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries, co-animated by Ched Myers, which defines itself as an "ecumenical experiment in discipleship, collaborative works of healing, justice, nonviolence and Oak Tree mutual aid" ("About Us"). Another would be the Simple Way, a thriving intentional community founded in 1998 by a young Baptist visionary Shane Claiborne. Living community life among the Philadelphia poor, sheltering the homeless, encouraging the use of homespun clothes and dumpster diving for food in resistance to society's wasteful consumption patterns and economic injustice, the Simple Way is among U.S. most charismatic "new monastic" communities, a prophetic and revolutionary movement that can transform the structures of American society.

5 "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction'" (Exodus 16:4).

6 "We are the ninety-nine percent" was the motto of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

7 Myers is the co-founder of the Sabbath Economics Collaborative and author of *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* (Church of the Saviour: Tell the Word Press, 2001).

The dynamic development of similar initiatives all over the country inspires Adam Bucko, an advocate for the homeless youth and co-author of *New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Life in the 21 Century* (2013), to envision an imminent fulfillment of Whitman's "spiritual democracy" in the streets of North America. Fascinated by the Occupy Wall Street movement, this spontaneous coalition of ordinary Americans outraged by corporate greed and dedicated to the politics of nonviolence and solidarity, Bucko salutes the Occupy Generation in his most recent publication, *Occupy Spirituality: A Radical Vision for a New Generation* (2013), which he co-authored with theologian Matthew Fox. The authors see young Americans as spiritual warriors capable of reinvesting American streets and institutions "with ecological values and the values of social justice that assure our sustainability as a species as well as the health and beauty of this planet" (xxii). Having outlined the glaring socio-economic injustices alive in the country, Bucko and Fox conclude that the moral outrage, justly felt by the young, needs to be disciplined by a lived spirituality if it is to bear lasting fruit (xxv). The young who are "on a spiritual as much as a political quest" (xxvi) need to rediscover the tradition of radical discipleship.

The second part of this article will focus on two iconic figures of radical discipleship that might serve as role models for the new Radical Generation of Americans: Ammon Hennacy (1893–1970) and Jim Corbett (1933–2001). The former was an important "angelic troublemaker"[8] of the twentieth century, closely associated with the Christian anarchist tradition of The Catholic Worker movement. Representing an older, mostly Roman Catholic-based activist tradition, he has been, for some obscure reason, omitted from the recently published encyclopedia of American dissidents.[9] My intention is to reclaim his place in the radical Christian tradition and suggest ways in which his radicalism has been carried on beyond 1970, the year of his death. Throughout his long and eventful life Hennacy was: draft dodger, social worker, tax resister, vegetarian, advocate of voluntary poverty and retributive justice, Christian anarchist, picketer for peace, founder of the Joe Hill House of Hospitality in Utah. As such, he is a perfect embodiment of the peacemaker for whom the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself has most radical connotations.

A different strand of radical Christianity is represented by Jim Corbett, best known for his faith-based opposition to the unjust immigration policy of the

8 *A Peace of the Anarchy: Ammon Hennacy and Other Angelic Troublemakers in the USA* is a documentary that honors Hennacy's place in the tradition of radical activism (Lovarchy-Shalom Productions 2004).

9 *American Dissidents: An Encyclopedia of Troublemakers, Subversives, and Prisoners of Conscience*. Ed. Kathlyn Gay. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012.

1980s and his articulation of sabbath economics as fostering land redemption and sustainable co-dwelling of humans with other species. Jim Corbett's legacy is twofold: on the one hand, it is carried on by the New Sanctuary movement which sprang into existence in 2007 to defend the dignity and humanity of immigrants threatened with ruthless deportation and separation from families and their U.S. born children; on the other, by Saguaro-Juniper Corporation, a community of associates who consider themselves stewards of the land, in accord with Corbett's interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures and his advocacy of a "sanctuary for all life." In mainstream Christianity Bible-based environmental activism is often seen as a contradiction in terms; the discovery of stewardship in the notoriously misunderstood command "to subdue the earth," supposedly implying a mandate to exploit the earth for profit, does not come easily. Although the environmental vision has a solid grounding in the Christian mystical tradition (from St. Francis of Assisi to Thomas Berry), Christian environmental activism is a relatively late development. For this reason Corbett's twofold faith-inspired vision and its relevance for the tradition of radical discipleship is worth reclaiming.

Ammon Hennacy and the One-Man Revolution in America

Ammon Hennacy was a life-long embodiment of what he called the "one-man revolution."[10] Having discovered the revolutionary message of the Sermon on the Mount while serving time for resisting World War I military draft, and having become an anarchist under the influence of Leo Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is within You," Hennacy realized that "to change the world by bullets or ballots was a useless procedure... the only revolution worthwhile was the revolution within the heart. Each could make this by himself and not wait on the majority" (*Book of Ammon* 31).

Although Hennacy had been an anarchist in the indigenous American tradition[11] since 1918, it was in the 1930s that he came into contact with a Christian community that gave him the much needed support and an intellectual tradition to rely on. Founded in 1932 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, the Catholic Worker movement drew inspiration from the social program of the Roman Catholic Church and from the personalist philosophy emanating from France. Members of

10 He wrote a book entitled *The One-Man Revolution in America*, Hennacy's private history of U.S. anarchist radicalism.

11 James J. Martin claims that individual anarchism is "the only part of the radical movement native to America." *Men Against the State: The Expositors of Individualist Anarchism in America 1927–1908* (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Publisher Inc., 2007), p. ix.

the community adopted lives of sharing and voluntary poverty, opening Houses of Hospitality to provide lodging for the homeless, distributing free meals to the victims of the Great Depression, and starting agricultural farms to introduce city dwellers to the spiritual values of living on the land. In 1937 Dorothy Day's unqualified pacifism and her refusal to endorse General Franco in the Spanish War caused an outrage of patriotic, church-going Americans. Anarchism had enjoyed bad press in the country since the Haymarket affair in 1886. Only a pacifist anarchist could possibly be a worse American, and Dorothy, although a Catholic, was both a pacifist and an anarchist. To make matters worse, the other founder of the movement, Peter Maurin, claimed in private that "all thinking people are anarchists" (Hennacy, *Book of Ammon* 51), although he preferred to call himself a personalist. Hennacy was thrilled to meet his soul mates.

He started distributing Dorothy Day's magazine, the *Catholic Worker*, on the streets and in front of churches to help propagate the ideas of the nonviolent revolution. The two also took a firm stand against the new war draft. In May 1943, Hennacy published a non-resistant statement in the *Catholic Worker* and declared his readiness to renounce his job as a consequence. His readings in Tolstoy and his talks with Dorothy Day forced him to consider the injustice of the war tax.[12] Denouncing as unchristian the payment of taxes that helped finance wars, Day supported her fellow anarchist's decision not to pay the tax for 1943. Not surprisingly, Hennacy's employer was of a different opinion and fired him the following day. This is how Hennacy's life of voluntary poverty began.

In the autobiographical *The Book of Ammon*, Hennacy describes how the lack of property gave him freedom from the tax collector, while his embrace of vegetarianism rendered his life simple and ethical. "My ideas," he claims, "are above and beyond that noise counting which takes place at the ballot box, and the economic system which myself and other free spirits follow is above and beyond the market place" (*The Book of Ammon* 68). In May 1943 Hennacy lived on $10 the entire month and sent the rest of his earnings to his estranged wife and daughters. Baking his bread, cooking vegetarian meals, traveling on foot, renouncing medical care and pension schemes, he was independent of the empire and a free spirit in the tradition of America's old pioneers. On Sundays in the summer, he would get up before 6 a.m., oversee the irrigation system in the orchard where he worked, and set out for a town or the nearest Indian reservation to distribute the *Catholic Worker*, socialize, and talk about conscientious objection to anyone who wanted to listen. Finally, having decided to be closer to the conscientious objectors among the nonviolent Hopi Indians, Hennacy moved to Arizona and

12 No doubt Thoreau's was a powerful influence in this respect too, but Henncay does not mention it explicitly in his *The Book of Ammon.*

worked on vegetable ranches or picked cotton with Mexican, Indian, Black, or Anglo "winos," as if in anticipation of the intentional communities of today whose members move in with the destitute to share their lives. But Hennacy's refusal to support the violence of the state in any form whatsoever, including the payment of the newly instituted withholding tax, drastically limited the range of jobs available to those which enabled him to collect his wages at the end of each working day and thus outwit the tax collector. He was constantly on the move.

Protesting the violence of the state, this follower of the "rebel" Jesus (Hennacy, *Book of Ammon* 153) would frequently resort to fasting on particular occasions, such as the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The first such fast took place on August 7, 1950.[13] True to the Gandhian principle of good will and frankness, the protester first informed the city authorities and the tax man about his plans. Then, armed in several tax refusal statements and posters, he started what was to become an annual tradition. Years later he was to claim that Americans had difficulties understanding fasting and that his main objective in reclaiming and publicizing that old monastic tradition was to purify the heart of negative emotions toward the tax collector and other agents of the state and "to wake up and encourage the timid pacifists and anarchists who did not dare oppose the powers that be" (Hennacy, *Book of Ammon* 241).

Hennacy spent much of the 1950s in Dorothy Day's New York House of Hospitality helping to feed her "bums," as he called them, agitating, co-editing the *Catholic Worker*, writing his autobiography, picketing, touring the country, getting in and out of prison, and leading the community into more active forms of protests. In June 1955 the first compulsory air raid drill was to take place in the state of New York. Believing the drill to be a preparation for war, Hennacy, Day, and twenty four other pacifists gathered in City Hall Park and refused to take cover. Arrested and faced with up to a year in jail, some protesters pled guilty on the anarchist principle "we did it once and we will do it again" (Hennacy, *Book of Ammon* 288). The press was divided in its evaluation of the event, but *Harpers* courageously praised especially "two of the group—Dorothy Day and Ammon Hennacy... [who] have a long and honorable tradition of being arrested for doing what ought to be done but no one else cares to. In meekly running for cover, the rest of us have only compounded the dishonesty of a Civil Defense program that is neither serious nor safe" (qtd. in Hennacy, *Book of Ammon* 288–89).

The air raid protest became a regular feature in the Catholic Worker picketing season. Their direct action against the drills continued to attract more and more anti-war demonstrators until, in 1961, 2000 protesters refused to take shelter, as

13 The exact anniversary, 6 Aug, fell on Sunday and Hennacy believed he should start the fast on the first working day after that date (Hennacy, *Book of Ammon* 164).

a result of which, and following a massive media coverage of the event, the compulsory defense drill in New York was discontinued (Cooney). Hennacy's belief that the one-person revolution would encourage others to unite in their struggle for a peaceful world was justified once more.

Yet, Hennacy was not a "joiner." In 1961 he left New York to start a Joe Hill House of Hospitality in Utah. Named after a labor activist, songwriter for the Industrial Workers of the World, and a socialist martyr, the place provided hospitality to, mostly, local drunkards in need of rehabilitation. Ever the activist and agitator, Hennacy was now growing more introspective, examining his life in the context of other "one-person revolutions," and crediting especially Dorothy Day and Alexander Berkman with encouraging him on his revolutionary road (Hennacy, *One-Man Revolution* 334). As a matter of fact, the very idea of the one-person revolution may have been inspired by Dorothy Day's obsessive question: "how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?" (Day, *Loaves and Fis*hes 210).

Hennacy was not the only one inspired by Dorothy Day's example. The "long and honorable tradition of being arrested for doing what ought to be done but no one else cares to," so vividly epitomized by her and Hennacy, includes numerous activists who embraced the Sermon on the Mount as their loadstar and, at one point or another, came in contact with the Catholic Worker. The most famous among them are probably the Berrigan Brothers, leaders in the Civil Rights movement and protesters against the war in Vietnam. Philip (1923–2002), a Josephite priest, and Daniel (1921-), a Jesuit, made history on May 17, 1968 when they, along with seven other Roman Catholic activists, raided the Catonsville, Maryland, draft board. Dragging into an empty parking lot over 370 files of young men about to be drafted into the army, the Catonsville Nine, as the group was to be called, burnt the files using homemade napalm and then patiently waited for the police to arrive. Their intention was not only to demonstrate their pacifist stand and protest the wartime draft, but also to dramatize the atrocities American soldiers were committing against the Vietnamese civilians. During his court trial Daniel Berrigan made a devastating accusation of wars and the indiscriminate violence of the state which issues its citizens death certificates in the form of draft cards, forcing innocent people to be agents of injustice and violence. The following statement made history: To the "good friends" in the courtroom, outraged by the Catonsville Nine action, Daniel apologized "for the fracture of good order, the burning of paper instead of children" (Berrigan 18).

The Berrigans, in turn, inspired a wave of anti-war activities in the late 1960s and beyond. On January 25, 1971 they featured on the cover of *Time* magazine as "Rebel Priests." In 1980 the Berrigans started a peace initiative called the Plowshares Movement. The name was inspired by the Old Testament prophet

Isaiah's vision of the reign of the Messiah, when people "shall beat their swords into plowshares" (Is. 2:4). Together with six others, the Berrigans trespassed on the General Electric nuclear missile facility in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, and literally hammered on the cones of nuclear warheads. The "Plowshares Eight" set the pattern for numerous other Plowshares actions that followed. The fact that in 2015 the Plowshares Movement celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary proves a determined resistance of radical Americans to the nuclear way of life and their belief that another world, free of nuclear threat, is possible.

Refusing allegiance to any human government, Christian anarchists struggle to implement a kingdom of peace and justice based on an alternative logic, the logic of unconditional love for all. The Sermon on the Mount and the commandment to love one's enemies constitute the core of radical Christianity. Ammon Hennacy, Dorothy Day, and other activists discussed in this part of the article started to construct a better world by fighting the revolution of the heart; they knew that only the transformed heart, filled with universal compassion for all victims of circumstance and violence alike, is able to further the cause of peace and justice in the wider world. Their refusal to accept killing in the name of law included activism on behalf of people on the death row. Their preoccupation with the dignity of every human being finds its logical continuity in contemporary restorative justice initiatives and the new abolitionist movement aimed at the death penalty. Groups like Journey of Hope, Murder Victims' Families for Reconciliation, the Forgiveness Project and Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights protest against capital punishment on the ground that is it just another link in the vicious circle of violence and that, instead of healing, it produces new kinds of victims.

One of the best-known activists against the death penalty is Sr. Helen Prejean, a former spiritual advisor to a convicted murderer on the death row and author of the bestselling book *Dead Man Walking*. Having accompanied several other men to their deaths, Sr. Hellen was compelled to write *Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions* and co-found Ministry Against the Death Penalty. In a web post dated Feb. 4, 2015, Shane Claiborne quotes disturbing statistics illustrating the scandal of capital punishment. Every tenth person awaiting execution, he writes, is found innocent. "What if an airline crashed one of every 10 flights?," asks Claiborne. "Innocence has raised questions for many of us," continues the founder of the Simple Way, diagnosing the condition of the death penalty as "critical" ("Checking Pulse on the Death Penalty").

Today the exploration of connections between Christianity and anarchism is carried on through such networks as Jesus Radicals, a website created in 2000 to honor the first group of Wheaton College students participating at the School of Americas Watch in Fort Benning, Georgia. Co-created by Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, a Trinidadian-born Mennonite, and her partner Andy, it seeks to broaden the

Christian anarchist engagement beyond the terms defined by white heterosexual males, who "are primarily concerned with the anti-statist, anti-war and anti-capitalist aspects of anarchism" (Alexis-Barker) to include other radical Christian perspectives, complete with veganarchism and animal liberation frameworks. Resisting all forms of domination, Jesus Radicals and other radical Christians often live their daily lives in absolute opposition to imperial power. The personal once again becomes the political for people like Alexis-Baker, who lives her creed "through her vegan practice and advocacy, [and by] serving on the anti-racism team at AMBS, cultivating mutually supportive and empowering friendships, and living in interspecies community with her spouse and their carnivore roomies, cats Mocha and Cairo" (Alexis-Baker).

Jim Corbett and a Sanctuary for All Life

In 1980 President Carter signed a Refugee Act that substantially raised the limit of refugees admitted annually to the U.S. and recognized the right to asylum of every person subject to persecution in their homelands. Still, the following year, the Reagan administration sought to introduce changes into American immigration that would reflect the government's Cold War policy. Supporting pseudo-democracies and the "benevolent" U.S.-trained dictators installed in Central America to curtail the spread of communism south of the U.S. border, the government denied the status of refugees to those escaping from the Guatemalan / Salvadoran war zone. In the rhetoric of the White House, they were coming to the U.S. in search of economic advantages rather than fleeing life-threatening conditions in their homelands. Despite the risk of deportation, those who managed to sneak past the Border Patrol "opted for the uncertainty of hiding illegally in this country over the risk of perishing at the hands of death squads or guerrillas back home," writes Juan Gonzalez in his *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America* (139).

When Jim Corbett, a Quaker with a philosophy degree from Harvard who was living the life of a goat-keeper in Tucson, Arizona, accidentally visited a detention center, he knew he could not afford a bystander status: hundreds of illegal aliens were awaiting deportation; they were dehydrated, hungry, and delirious with fear. What should a conscientious person do living in a country which denies them asylum; a country which had created the refugee problem by committing crimes against humanity with U.S. taxpayers' money? Acting on an impulse, Corbett bonded several Salvadorans out of jail and secured legal assistance for them. The rancher also appealed to local churches for help, liquidated his assets, and ended up sharing his house with twenty refugees. In the long run, however, Corbett envisioned an informal network of secret routes and places of rest for refugees escaping perse-

cution through the Mexican-American border. Modeled on the nineteenth-century Underground Railroad that guided escaped slaves to safety in Canada, at the peak of its activity the Sanctuary Movement involved 45 faith communities, thousands of churches, several synagogues, and six hundred religious organizations across the U.S. (Guzder 107). Sanctuary, originally a church where fugitives were immune to arrest, was for Corbett a religious activity; it meant practicing solidarity with the dispossessed and the forgotten (Guzder 194). Having herded cattle and goats in southeastern Arizona, Corbett knew the Mexican-American borderlands well enough to guide illegal immigrants to safety. In three years he conducted an estimated 700 refugees across the Arizona desert. Arrested and sentenced to probation in 1986, he pledged there would be no change in the movement's work. Unlike Hennacy, though, he did not consider himself an anarchist, nor did he call his involvement with the Sanctuary Movement civil disobedience. He claimed civil initiative instead, which he understood as "active fulfillment and expression of the higher, natural law that is written on the heart," (Burklo). It was the U.S. government that was breaking international law, argued Corbett.

His determined defense of undocumented aliens helped launch a prophetic interfaith movement to carry out a political critique. Sheltering and in other ways providing help to those whose basic rights—to life, liberty, and dignity—were violated by the INS and who, in practice, were reduced to the status of slaves, Sanctuary activists resisted the oppressive apparatus of the state and led countless illegal aliens beyond the confines and provisions of the empire. In his book *Messianism Against Christology: Resistance Movements, Folk Arts, and Empire*, activist and historian of religions James W. Perkinson links Corbett's interest in pastoral nomadism and the survival skills he acquired as a goat herder in the Arizona desert to his ability to live independently of the economy of the empire in his "coyote" days (33). As Corbett himself believed, such economic independence, to be resorted to in case of emergency, is indispensable if an effective critique of systemic injustices is to be carried out by the emerging social movements; otherwise the critique will "be undercut by fear" (Perkinson 33).

Jim Corbett found a role model for himself and for the movement he co-founded in the semi-nomadic Israelites of the Hebrew Scriptures who lived off the land and away from the tyrannies of Babylon and Egypt. For the Quaker and activist, the identity of the pastoral-nomadic people was rooted "in the actuality of having gone 'feral'" (Corbett, *Sanctuary* 121). Anticipating anarcho-primitivism, Corbett had a vision of a sanctuary far transcending that for undocumented refugees: a sanctuary for all life. Having devoted most of his life to earth rights and land redemption, he drew on Jewish mysticism and the Biblical story of the Covenant to reclaim a way of life based on harmony with nature and honoring the sacredness of all life. In his posthumously published book Corbett explains:

> I do not intend to argue here against personal, political, or cultural efforts to reduce the violence, but I do want to emphasize that active allegiance to the Peaceable Kingdom begins with land redemption that lays the foundation for a covenant community's practice of true justice. In exile where we belong to no wildland community, we remain inextricably entangled in technocratic civilization's global war of conquest, which means we can only choose to reduce the damage. No amount of resistance to our warmaking way of living will institute and cultivate a way to live peacefully, in community with untamed life. The fundamental obligation of the community that gives its allegiance to the Peaceable Kingdom is to redeem a home in the land where it can walk the covenanted way. (*Sanctuary* 120–21)

This is an important contribution to the philosophy of nonviolence and peacemaking. Although Corbett articulates a principle many peacemakers have usually followed, more or less instinctively, the force of his argument lies in the fact that faith-based land redemption and earth rights become the pivot upon which everything else turns. Equally importantly, this vision is grounded in the identity of God's chosen people. If the people of the Book are to be faithful to their biblical faith, they need to become humble stewards of the earth rather than its masters; they need to learn from the land and other species, argues Corbett. In his vision of sustainable co-dwelling with other species, the paradigm of discipleship replaces that of management. "If the cow-human symbiosis can outgrow the master-slave relation," he argues in his book subtitled *Cowballah* (a pun on the Jewish mystical book of Kabbalah and a cow herding lifestyle), "it could be a decisive opening for other interspecies partnerships and might also suggest ways to outgrow alienated livelihood relations that have succeeded chattel slavery, such as wage and market slaveries (Corbett, *Sanctuary* 86).

But the condition *sine qua non* is the recovery of the sabbath tradition, understood as a time of rest from the task of forcing the world to conform to human will. The Book of Leviticus commands the faithful to rest from work every seventh day and let the land return to the state of wilderness every jubilee year (seven times seven years) so that Israel can go "feral" and forage for food in a reenactment of its exile experience. The communion of all life can thus be reestablished. To Corbett, sabbath is the only alternative to conquest and a reminder that the people of Israel are rooted in their exit from bondage and idolatry; they are rooted in their exit from the warmaking way of living in the empire and always already on their way to the peaceable kingdom. In his review of *A Sanctuary for All Life*: *The Cowbalah of Jim Corbett*, Jim Burklo writes: "Corbett saw Jesus as a Jewish rabbi who announced 'jubilee'—the liberation of peasants from indenture, of Jews from Rome, of nature from human management. The Sermon on the Mount is a manifesto for the redemption not just of humanity,

but of the natural order, called for in the Torah." The law of jubilee, as Corbett believed, was written on the hearts of all sentient life: humans as well as "cows, goats, javelinas, mescals, and saguaros" (Burklo).

Against the religious right's appropriation of Christianity as a yardstick of patriotism, Corbett, in a truly radical spirit, sees an inalienable rift between what he calls "the cohesive powers of religio" and "the coercive powers of the state." Likewise, his embrace of sabbath economics over against the economy of profit shows his belief in an economy that fosters community growth "rather than political subjugation or technocratic alienation" (Corbett, "Sanctuary, Basic Rights"). Significantly, it was the support of the goat-milking cooperative Corbett was part of that was most helpful in the initial stages of his struggle to build the Sanctuary Movement. Clearly, an economy based on personal interaction between people who care for each other, builds the kingdom of peace. The opposite, Corbett concludes—the economy of profit—builds the kingdom of war.

On the other hand, Corbett's rejection of technocratic activity as the antithesis of *religio* echoes the classic Christian anarchist stance articulated by Jacques Ellul in his *The Technological Society* (1964). While technology facilitates the separation of human actions from their moral evaluation—a mechanism Zygmunt Bauman calls adiaphorisation—and thus allows, e.g., for the indiscriminate deportation of "illegal aliens" to countries where they face certain death, *religio* (from the Latin word *re-ligare*, to bind again) re-connects us with others so that we become aware of our all-pervading relationality: whatever happens to an element in the dense network of relationships that constitutes our being in the world happens to each one of us. "The communion that unites us," writes Corbett "is sanctuary" ("Sanctuary, Basic Rights").

But communion is also food and the sacrifice it is based on. As a "cow-wisperer" (Burklo) and lover of all forms of life, Corbett felt ambivalent about eating meat. On the other hand, in the nomadic-pastoral context animals are cared for, known as individuals, and loved, in contrast to the industrial farming of anonymous "livestock," which is raised for meat as commodity. Corbett's declaration: "I avoid eating anyone I have not known and cherished" (*Sanctuary for All Life* 104) may be a far-cry from the ideal of a radically understood nonviolent style of life, but it is a profoundly sane contribution to the philosophy of sustainability based on a communal vision of life. "When slaughter breaks the bond, the killing must be hallowed.... All food is sacramental"—this is how the philosopher-turned-herder retrieves the forgotten meaning of sacrifice. "The hallowing of our food has to do with care of the land, care that the animals on the land flourish" (Corbett, *Sanctuary for All Life* 111).

Ultimately, Corbett's quest for the recovery of humanity's organic relationship with nature parallels the biblical vision of salvation: it is a "quest to recover [hu-

manity's] homeland in Eden: an unfarmed, fruitful oasis; an untamed paradise of living waters" (Corbett, *Sanctuary* 258). To achieve this vision on a local scale, Corbett helped found the Juniper-Saguaro Corporation, a group of land associates, or stewards of the land, bound by a covenant known as "A Bill of Rights for Human Occupancy and the Private Governance of Wildlands." Dedicated to cherishing diversity and promoting a biocentric ethic, the Corporation has established its land as a sabbatical place: a place where humans can live the covenant with the land and where one can come to meditate and learn.

Corbett's efforts to re-connect humans within their bioregional materiality dispels the widespread misperception concerning Christianity's supposedly God-sanctioned drive to mastery over the earth, which, according to Lynn White's influential thesis, was to be almost solely responsible for the catastrophe of environmental degradation.[14] Retrieving sabbath economics as a basis for the peaceable kingdom and insisting on the biblical grounding of land rights, the Arizona goatherder and philosopher exposed the religious and ethical roots of the environmental movement. Thanks to people like Corbett, ecology has now become an inseparable ingredient of all Christian justice concerns. Even though in mainstream Christianity ecojustice activists still constitute a contradiction in terms, as Deena Guzder reports in her book *Divine Rebels: American Christian Activists for Social Justice*, they are becoming increasingly more visible. Ched Myers sees the struggle of religious radicals in apocalyptic terms: "in the face of ecocide, the choice before us is stark: discipleship or denial" ("A Watershed Movement" 21). Ever on the cutting edge of radical discipleship, Myers has been exploring the idea of Watershed Discipleship as a way of integrating environmental justice, sustainability, political imagination, and ecclesial renewal. "The watershed paradigm," writes Myers, "is radically contextual yet intrinsically universal, inviting us as church to let our resident landscapes shape our imagination and material habits" ("A Watershed Moment" 24). Creation care, sustainable economy, and social justice become integral aspects of redeeming the place one knows and loves best. A re-placed ecclesiastical community—the new church that is emerging—can become an "eco-village" (Myers, "A Watershed Moment" 24). In the dissemination of watershed/bioregional literacy, radical activists are being helped by specially established programs, like the Eco-Stewards Program,[15] and such events as Carnival de Resistance.[16]

14 Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155:3767, 10 March 1967.

15 "The Eco-Stewards Program is a grassroots organization building a community of young adults (ages 20–30) who want to explore the connection between their faith and the call to environmental stewardship." ecostewardsprogram.wordpress.com.

16 On the website carnivalderesistance.com one can read: The Carnival de Resistance is

Conclusions

The tradition of radical Christian discipleship—reclaimed in this article through the medium of a few representative stories of individual and communal resistance to the imperial politics of death, destruction, oppression, and injustice—is a tradition maintained *by* and *for* the people. Ever in opposition to (conscienceless) institutions and corporations, conscientious Americans have been putting their lives on the line to help build a better world "with liberty and justice for all." Dissatisfied with the corrupted promise of the American Dream, radical Christians have been active proclaiming liberty to the captives and justice to the oppressed by faithfully living the gospel and struggling to affirm the forces of life over against those of death. In the face of the current mobilization of people of faith in America, Jim Wallis has voiced his belief that a new Great Awakening is underway.[17] The debates started by the economic crisis and by the protests staged by the Occupy Generation have revealed a fundamental concern about values and identity. The radical activists seem to be asking Americans who they are and who they want to be. Mikah Bales, founding member of Friends of Jesus, a new Quaker Christian community, and organizer with Occupy Our Homes DC, proclaims: "We're in the midst of a tidal wave of change that is fundamentally re-shaping the character of the North American church. Millions of us are discovering the ideas of the radical discipleship movement, and a surprising number are embracing the call to abandon all—our comfort, our wealth, and even the Evangelical subculture—in order to follow Jesus" (Bales). Jim Wallis believes this "transformational moment" (2) is reshaping the whole country, not just the church. Frederic and Mary Ann Brusat, reviewers of *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America* (2008), assert that for Wallis the moment shares similarities with "the great social reform movements of the past that abolished slavery, established civil rights, extended voting rights, protected workers, and created a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens" (Brusat).

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focusing on reading and embodying the Judeo-Christian religion through an earth-friendly indigenous perspective, and as a resistance movement. We feel an enormous responsibility to be re-interpreting and reclaiming the deep meaning of our faith traditions- to understand them in a way that is liberatory, and about freedom, justice and restoration. We realize that justice and reconciliation are impossible without listening to the voices of the oppressed and their spiritual worldviews."

17 Jim Wallis, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

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Ewa Antoszek

Cinematic Representations of Homegirls: Echo Park vs. Hollywood in Allison Anders's *Mi Vida Loca*

Abstract: Allison Anders in *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) presents various aspects of gang life: from becoming a gang member, through various examples of female sisterhood and betrayal. Not resorting to gangxploitation, *Mi Vida Loca* is the "first commercial film to focus entirely on Chicana gang members" (Fregoso 97). Anders's project, well-grounded and well-designed, attempts to do away with numerous stereotypes concerning homegirls in L.A. and to portray a credible picture of gang life in Echo Park. At the same time, Anders's approach is relatively "partial in its one-sided view of la vida loca," which inevitably leads to further stereotyping of Chicana homegirls (Fregoso 97). The purpose of the article is to analyze assets and disadvantages of Anders's representation of Chicana female gang members focusing on the dynamics of the interplay between Hollywood (i.e. Anders's project) and the barrio—in that case Echo Park, L.A.

Keywords: pachucas/cholas/homegirls, gangxploitation, Echo Park, Allison Anders, *Mi Vida Loca*, political friendship, alternative citizenship in counternation

In recent years there has been an increased interest in representations of Chicano/a gangs and gang members, which is a result of the growing visibility of this ethnic group in the U.S. This has led to the "spectacularization of Latino gang life" (López-Calvo 81) and a new discursive system referred to as "Latinism" by Charles Ramírez Berg, a concept he derives from Edward Said's Orientalism and explains as "the construction of Latin America and its inhabitants and of Latinos in this country to justify the United States' imperialistic goals" (qtd. in López-Calvo 81–82). However, until very recently productions presenting gangs and the scholarship on this topic have both disregarded female gang members, preferring to focus solely on *pachucos*,[1] *cholos*[2] and homeboys. Moreover, the representations of *pachucas*, *cholas*, and homegirls that have appeared so far abound

1 Mexican-American adolescents belonging to the gangs at the beginning of the twentieth century.

2 Another term for a gang member.

in many stereotypes and disfigured images. Critics who examine the history of female participation in gangs have identified numerous misreadings with regard to these representations of women in gangs.

First of all, they refute a popular notion that women's participation in gangs is a recent phenomenon and indicate that women have been gang members for a long time. Nevertheless, because such activity contravenes patriarchal normativity regarding proper female behavior, female gang members have often been presented as bad girls who are socially maladjusted, unintelligent and promiscuous (Campbell 100; Moore and Hagedorn 179, 177).[3] Their behavior and activities have been decontextualized and examined against the middle-class paradigms of female behaviors, thus perpetuating stereotypes of gang girls even further.

Furthermore, many studies of female gang members have disregarded the diverse categorization of gangs and the variety of reasons behind gang membership. Monica Brown, referring to this phenomenon, maintains that popular analyses represented in such studies have ignored "a great diversity of female gang members and female gangs, with varied relationships to male gangs and varied motivations for joining" (89–90). The majority of early studies did not provide precise categorizations of gang membership, presenting homegirls solely as female auxiliaries of male gangs while overlooking other types of female gangs. Moreover, critics examining Chicano/a communities and Chicano/a gangs, including James Diego Vigil, Joan W. Moore, Marie "Keta" Miranda, Lisa C. Dietrich, and Monica Brown, have emphasized the fact that "street socialization" in Chicano/a communities is an effect of particular historical, social and spatial conditions and the resulting "multiple marginality" of people living in such communities, which is often ignored in studies that focus on the outcomes rather than analyze the reasons for the status quo (Vigil, *The Projects* 5; 4).

Consequently, the current interest in homegirls and media hype around the topic of female gang members not infrequently draws from long-prevailing stereotypes and continues to propagate disfigured images. As Brown observes, such "exploitation of the image of the girl gang member is simply the next step in the spectacularization of urban minority youth, perennially pictured as armed and dangerous" (86–87), and this is especially true with regard to women from ethnic minorities. Whether depicted as hypersexualized or desexualized, Chicana female gang members defy traditional male-imposed female roles and, because they can also resort to violence, their behaviors are treated as an aberration from the norm. Therefore, they have come to be seen as dangerous, "Other," aliens, or "savages,"

3 Early scholarship on *pachucas* and homegirls studies includes works by Thompson and Lozes (1976), Rice (1973), Ackley and Fliegel (1960), Cohen (1955), and the report by the Welfare Council of New York City (1950) (Campbell 100).

contributing to what Mike Davis calls the "gang scare" that "criminalize[s] gang members and their families as a class" (*City of Quartz* 270; 278). Finally, they can easily be placed in the role of scapegoats, whose presence poses a threat to the well-established rules and norms of the patriarchal society.

Allison Anders in *Mi Vida Loca* (1993) attempts to do away with these long-established stereotypes and to do justice to Chicana homegirls traversing the public spaces of L.A. In her film, Anders presents various aspects of gang life—from becoming a gang member through various examples of female sisterhood to betrayal. *Mi Vida Loca* is "the first film about Chicanas and about girl gangs to achieve wide distribution" (Hollinger 192) and reach larger audiences. As Susan Dever notes, the film "responds to the media and police-incited moral panic of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Los Angeles, where outbreaks of white middle-class fear of impoverished youth of color resulted in spectacular police repression" (132). Anders's aim in *Mi Vida Loca* is to address these growing concerns by challenging popular presumptions regarding Chicana homegirls.

Therefore, though the film has been advertised by HBO Showcase as a "gangxploitation movie" (Hollinger 192), it does not live up to that description, as Anders endeavors to challenge stereotypes surrounding homegirls and their representations in the media. As the "first commercial film to focus entirely on Chicana gang members" (Fregoso 97)[4] Anders's project is well-grounded and well-designed. The screening of the film was preceded by careful and detailed research that included consultations with gang members of Echo Park in Los Angeles, both before and during the production of the film. Consequently, she treats homegirls seriously and succeeds "in eliciting meaningful identifications with 'real' historical subjects" (Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters* 99).

The director calls her approach in the film "romantic realism" (Hollinger 192) and the main aim of deploying this technique is to "capture the external nuances of the characters' experiences while at the same time penetrating into their inner emotional lives" (Hollinger 192). This approach and style has been compared to "the social realist tradition of Latin American cinema" (Hollinger 192), even though, as Hollinger maintains, "Anders distances herself from the gritty look of social realism" (192). Nevertheless, the departure from gangxploitation is something unusual in this type of projects and constitutes one of the assets of Anders's film. At the same time, her approach is often criticized for being relatively partial in the presentation of gangs, which then leads to the further stereotyping of Chicana

4 Other projects depicting different versions of Chicano gang life (with a different degree of stereotyping of homeboys presented) include *Colors* (1988), dir. Dennis Hopper; *American Me* (1992), dir. Edward James Olmos; *Blood In Blood Out* (1993) a.k.a. *Bound by Honor*, dir. Taylor Hackford; and *Gang Warz* (2004) dir. Chris T. McIntyre.

homegirls. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze Anders's cinematic representation of Chicana female gang members, focusing on the dynamics of the interplay between Hollywood (i.e. Anders's project) and the barrio—in this case, Echo Park, L.A.

Mi Vida Loca tells the story of girl gang members from Echo Park, L.A.—the main characters include Sad Girl, Mousie, La Blue Eyes, Giggles, and Whisper. The film is divided into three parts: "Sad Girls, ¿Y qué?" "Don't Let No One Get You Down," and "Suavecito." In general these three parts present the issues of female friendship and various challenges that can threaten sisterhood. In addition, they also describe problems of the Chicano/a community and intergang rivalry. The main plot of *Mi Vida Loca* focuses on the story of Sad Girl and Mousie (played by Angel Aviles and Seidy Lopez, respectively), who have been friends since childhood until, as Fregoso summarizes, their "friendship ends when they both end up mothering babies by the same homeboy, Ernesto (Jacob Vargas)" ("Hanging Out" 1). Their story gets even more complicated when Ernesto is shot dead by one of his disappointed customers, a white female drug addict, and the girls have to find ways to support themselves and their children. From then on, the two women have to learn how to manage as single teenage mothers in unfavorable conditions—in a barrio "where boyfriends, fathers and husbands end up in prison or in the grave" (Fregoso, "Hanging Out" 1). Consequently, their lives oscillate around survival but, what is even more important, they also try to rebuild female bonds of solidarity that will help them overcome numerous challenges. Apart from Sad Girl and Mousie's story, there are two other major subplots in the film. The first subplot "features an epistolary romance between [Sad Girl's sister] La Blue Eyes and El Duran, the member of the rival gang from the River Valley, while he is in prison" (Fregoso, "Hanging Out" 1). The last story in the final part is the tale of Suavecito, a lowrider truck which becomes Ernesto's lifelong obsession. This subplot both acquaints the viewer with male gang members of East L.A. and their behaviors as well as provides an insight into important cultural aspects of contemporary Chicano/a youth, including graffiti, murals and lowriding.

Anders's film and her representation of Chicana homegirls have several advantages. First of all, the film does reflect the reality of living in the barrio or that of gang life in several aspects. As Marie "Keta" Miranda observes, *Mi Vida Loca* "captured the language of youth. The prominence of tattoo and graffiti art, and [Anders's] use of music to render the story line, skillfully expressed the subcultural style of Chicana youth in gangs" (1). Such faithfulness in the depiction of life in the barrio can already be seen at the very beginning of the film, as viewers watch the skyline of Los Angeles behind the freeway, which is a symbolic and real, spatial border dividing Los Angeles into different communities, into "us"—Chicanos/as living in the barrio—and "them." Then, the camera focuses in on the Chicano/a

neighborhood, depicting what it looks like in detail, while in the background local music is played by a Chicano band, The Crusados. They "invite viewers to enter the barrio, [yelling]: 'Let's take a trip down to Echo Park Avenue!'" (Dever 136), reemphasizing with those first lines of the film the aforementioned division into insiders who live in the barrio and outsiders who are just about to start a trip down these streets and find out what they look like for themselves. The Crusados' lyrics paradoxically both introduce the binary opposition of two sides of L.A. or its neighborhoods and, as Dever suggests, "remind locals of the interconnected culture and history of all L.A.'s Latino neighborhoods" (136). To show this interconnectedness, Dever argues that:

> Their invitation is a recontextualization of the words of Thee Midniters's hit that invited '60s listeners to 'Take a trip down Whittier Boulevard!' This reference to the two widely known groups (and the two distinct neighborhoods) simultaneously speaks to the unity with the larger Latino community these groups have engendered, as well as to the impossibility of some kind of essentialized, autonomous turf within any single barrio. While The Crusados have ushered us into a specific gang territory, bounded by specific street names with which gangs tend to mark their turf, all of us—gang members, filmmakers, spectators of all kinds—have links to other people and places. This linkage, Anders says through her credit sequence, is part of the eclectic nature of community itself. Yet, however syncretic, however democratically cruised by anyone, the streets Anders focuses on constitute a decidedly local space within a global context. As her subsequent sequences suggest, and as one of Echo Park's homeboys will remind viewers, 'You can come into our neighborhood as long as you respect us.' The filmmaker's highlighting of community codes has set the stage for this respectful meeting of outsiders and insiders. (136)

These introductory scenes are followed by several snapshots of Echo Park neighborhood, with a peaceful-looking park and a lake which projects an idyllic image. Immediately afterwards, Anders undermines her role as author through a voice-over that informs viewers who is going to be the narrator/narrators. These scenes are followed by shots from a neighborhood that are no longer so idyllic—we see a market, streets, a maternity shop, vending carts, ads, electrical wires overhead, graffiti tags, etc., which all add up to create a picture of the "*rasquache*, make-do neighborhood" (Dever 138). Finally, as Dever indicates, these scenes in general and the narrator's voice in particular reiterate the division between "us" and "them," "insiders and outsiders [who] here exist separately" (137).

Anders's insistence on truthfulness in her presentation of reality in Echo Park is also visible in the way the characters are dressed, made-up, as well as the manner in which they walk and talk. Fregoso has noticed Anders's efforts to reflect the reality of the barrio and homegirls living there, appreciating

its "verisimilitude, its attention to the details of everyday life, and its faithful rendition of the style, stance, posture, gestures, mannerisms and speech of so many Pachucas-Cholas-Homegirls [she has] known throughout years" ("Hanging Out" 1). Through their looks homegirls from Echo Park postulate the aesthetic that manifests their unwillingness to look white, which is constantly emphasized by make-up, clothes, style, etc. Even more so, by adopting such aesthetics they are also supposed to look threatening, which can be achieved, for example, by the specific use of eyeliner. In fact, such an attitude is quite popular among homegirls—Norma Mendoza-Denton has interviewed some gang girls for her project on female gangs style and cultural practice, and one of her interviewees has revealed that the idea behind such style is that "[e]verybody looks at you but nobody fucks with you" (156). In addition, it presumes being more macha, and "being macha is not about being masculine, but about taking charge of one's self … and not being controlled" (Mendoza-Denton 169). Finally, such looks show homegirls' "refusal of the hegemonic paradigm" of looks and fashion (Mendoza-Denton 160) that differentiates them from adult Chicanos/as from the barrio and outsiders.

Aside from depicting adherence to a non-white aesthetic Anders attempts to reflect other features of homegirls' style in a detailed way, insisting, in this case, on an adherence to reality. The director herself admits that in order to render her representations of homegirls truthful she took advantage of her gang consultants who "advised her on everything from the style, gestures, and speech of her characters to the music she used on the sound track" (Hollinger 193). This effect is reinforced by the fact that the director introduces real gang members into the film—for example, Whisper is played by Nelida Lopez, who is an actual member of the Echo Park Locas. The appearance of real gang members works both in accordance with the "socialist-realist tradition of Latin American Third Cinema" (Fregoso, "Hanging Out" 2) adopted by Anders while adding to the truthfulness of the director's rendering of homegirls in the L.A. barrio.

Furthermore, in her effort to present a credible picture of gang life in Echo Park, Anders deploys multiple narrators who present different points of view and perceptions on their roles in the gang. In this way the spectator has an opportunity to learn about life in this barrio from multiple perspectives. Hollinger maintains that such a technique contributes to "*Mi Vida Loca*'s episodic narrative structure, with its fragmented, loosely constructed plotline" (200), which, at the same time, "has a substantial distancing effect" (200), due to the fact that "the multiple voice-over narrational device prevents the spectator from primary engagement with any one character" (200). Instead of identifying with only one character, the spectator is offered "different points of view for potential audience identification... [which] allows viewers to stand back and adopt a more thoughtful perspective in regard to the issues raised by the film than they would if they were strongly implicated

in the emotional experiences of a single character" (Hollinger 200). Consequently, the viewers are encouraged by the director to both engage in the story and remain objective, following it through the eyes of different characters. Owing to this technique, *Mi Vida Loca* encourages its viewers to draw their own conclusions based on facts presented from different perspectives, rather than provides them with ready-made opinions and judgments.

Finally, in her adherence to the reality, Anders presents how cultural identity is constructed: in her film, Anders depicts the ways in which both individual and collective identities are formed. She also endeavors to indicate how multiple social, temporal, historical, and spatial variables influence the formation of these identities. *Mi Vida Loca* allows the viewer to identify both internal and external forces and variables that help fashion homegirls' identities. It also delineates the specific interplay of spatial and cultural factors in the process of identity constructions, drawing the viewer's attention to the interdependence of "forces of transculturation [from within] and from without" (Dever 138). Anders illustrates this interconnectedness by referencing the changing dynamics in the relationship of the two languages used in the barrio—English and Spanish and the gradually dominating role English is playing there, which is reflected in both private conversations and the public sphere, including store signs, advertisements and banners.

In addition to the advantages of Anders's representation of female gang members mentioned above, the director does not spectacularize gang life, nor is there any glorification of violence in *Mi Vida Loca*, distinguishing it from other films depicting this lifestyle. As Fregoso notes, "in commercial films, gang violence is so heavy-handed to the point of titillation that is has become a staple of the gang genre" (Hanging Out" 1). Moreover, she continues, "[i]n these films, viewers will see a great deal of macho bravado with the usual fare of violence between rival gangs or between gangs and police. This on-screen violence is more often glamorized and emptied of its tragic social and human consequences" ("Hanging Out" 1). Unlike the representations Fregoso mentions in her article, Anders does not resort to this approach, even in scenes where the presentation of violence could be somewhat justified. For example, the scene depicting jumping in to the gang is relatively short, with the very act of being jumped in—or, in other words, beaten by gang members as a form of introduction to the gang—not as violent as some researchers describe it to be. Furthermore, almost no violence is shown at all on screen, but rather happens "behind the scenes," as in the case of Sad Girl and Mousie's fight, or Ernesto's death. The viewer hears the shot, which can be confusing, as one does not know who was killed—whether it was one of the homegirls or Ernesto with Whisper. But the next scene presents Ernesto's funeral, saving the spectators the gory details of the shooting. A similar approach is taken in the final scene, when Big Sleepy's daughter is shot in a drive-by.

Finally, to conclude this analysis of the assets of Anders's representation of homegirl life in *Mi Vida Loca*, the film can be described as "a political friendship film" (Hollinger 195), as it portrays both "a sentimental female friendship" (Hollinger 195), particularly between Mona (Sad Girl) and Maribel (Mousie) and "the realm of political group friendship, as it comes to center on the homegirls' attempts to unite under the leadership of Giggles [who]... becomes the guiding force behind the homegirls' attempts to take care of themselves by organizing a female gang" (Hollinger 195). In fact, this cooperation between the homegirls as well as their mutual support for each other—while challenging the roles that have been ascribed to them by homeboys—seem to be the core of Anders's film. It is seen both in the reconciliation of Sad Girl and Mousie and the formation of the gang with Giggles as their new leader. Consequently, the gang is represented as a place that "provides meaning and identity for these girls" (Quicker 56) and, as described by Quicker, "it is a place where their status is unambiguous, but it is much more. It is a substitute for all those other things that they do not have, a place where they can receive warmth, friendship, understanding, education and protection" (56).

It can be said that, in a way, Anders shows that gang membership allows for what Brown calls "alternative citizenship in a counternation" (xxiii). Such an alternative is necessary because of the dichotomy of "subjects and citizens" (Brown xxv) that excludes homegirls from citizenship—they have "no public sphere to locate themselves" (Brown 84) and they live in "forgotten territories within the nation" (92). Los Angeles and California as they are presented in *Mi Vida Loca* are far from paradise, especially for Chicana women who experience multiple marginalization "within their local communities, by the state, and in their private relationships with men" (Brown 81). Therefore, becoming a gang member is an alternative for a Chicana girl, since the gang "fulfills fundamental needs not accorded by the state" (Brown xxiii), which include such diverse aspects as a sense of belonging and economic support.

Nevertheless, acknowledging the gang's role as formative and supportive space for her characters, Anders does not hesitate to show how gangs "simultaneously liberate and oppress women" (Portillo in Chesney-Lind 158), which is particularly visible in scenes devoted to the debate over Suavecito after Ernesto's death. The homeboys from Echo Park do not even want to take into consideration the fact that the truck should be sold and the money distributed to the women who have been dependent on Ernesto—his mother and the mothers of his children. Instead, the boys insist on keeping Suavecito with the gang and entering the contest of lowriders, completely disregarding the difficult situation in which the women have found themselves upon Ernesto's death. Marginalization of women in the gang can also be seen in several scenes which depict debates on power distribution in the

gang. Significantly, the women are either absent from these discussions or their opinions are not taken into account.

Therefore, they have to learn how to cope with discrimination within a gang, while female sisterhood becomes an alternative. Even if they sometimes have difficulty reaching an agreement over some aspects of their life, as it is during the discussion about Suavecito, the help and support they find among themselves become the source of their power as well as an inspiration to change the status quo. To illustrate this role of female bonding Anders makes Giggles the driving force of transformations among the homegirls. Giggles herself is a complex character, as she has sacrificed her life for a man by serving a prison sentence for him. However, during her time spent in prison she has learnt her lesson and, upon finally being released, is ready to change her life completely. She talks about her experience and wants to share her ideas with the other homegirls, who, at first, look suspiciously at her lessons and zeal. They cannot quite accept the main message she wants to pass along, namely that "Guys ain't worth falling down over" and their strength should be driven by female solidarity and sisterhood. Giggles's project and her new attitudes are a great example of what Brown calls "forging alternative reality" (83) to challenge the multiple oppressions these women encounter in their everyday life.

In spite of the aforementioned assets of Anders's representation of the experience of homegirls from Echo Park, her approach has encountered severe criticism in some circles. *Mi Vida Loca* has been discussed, critiqued, and criticized both by mainstream journalists and authors and representatives of the Chicano/a community. First of all, mainstream criticism was reflected in the reception of the film—it was not very popular among general audiences, most probably due to its lack of an affirmative ending, since, as Hollinger maintains, "[b]y 1994, when *Mi Vida Loca* was released, female friendship films had already established a set of conventional audience expectations for the cycle" (198). These include both a happy ending and a positive/affirmative message that such films should convey—which *Mi Vida Loca* misses. Anders's project lacks "a simple glorification of female bonding" (Hollinger 196) and proposes an ambivalent *finale*: Mona's words concluding one of the final scenes suggesting that guns can be used by homegirls for love is juxtaposed with Big Sleepy's daughter's tragic death in a drive-by shooting, which, in a way, undermines Sad Girl's explanation and her justification for the use of arms. Due to such an ending, the film has often been described as "fatalistic or nihilistic" (Hollinger 196).

This accusation has also been voiced with reference to Anders's rendering of the theme of gang life in L.A.'s Chicano/a community. As Hollinger notes, "mainstream critics have condemned the film for offering a stereotypical portrait of urban minority teenagers living aimless lives that involve irresponsible sex,

teenage motherhood, crime, and drugs" (194). They have indicated that, instead of challenging stereotypes regarding homeboys and homegirls, *Mi Vida Loca* perpetuates disfigured images of young Chicanos/as and misconceptions concerning their behavior. In her analysis of *Mi Vida Loca*, Fregoso compiles critiques that have appeared in reviews published after the film's release, both in the U.S. and abroad, as well as identifies the main accusations critics have posited such as "paternalism, negative stereotypes, nihilism, depiction of teenagers without ambition drifting downward into chaos and dead-end lives" ("Hanging Out" 2). Therefore, what seems to be repeatedly criticized in these reviews is a disfigured image of a Chicana homegirl perpetuated by Anders through her presentation of Echo Park Locas. And, in fact, to a certain degree these accusations are justified, since such a depiction of Chicana female gang members and their role both within the community and in the gang disregards the complexity of their situation and the variety of alternative lifestyles a Chicana homegirl can lead.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that Anders does base her presentation of the barrio on real life problems people living there encounter on a daily basis. For example, as Brown observes, teenage pregnancy, as it has been evoked by one of the critics, is often "expected reality, one that can cement a woman's place and meaning within a given social milieu, at least temporarily, if not permanently" (99). Furthermore, it is often also a way out of loneliness and the reality of abuse, and provides "a more stable sense of gender identity" (Miranda 96). Finally, as Fregoso maintains, "hopelessness and helplessness is in fact pervasive among inner-city youth" and unless something is done to solve "the very serious structural problems of the inner city, a positive or uplifting ending to a gang film is like empty moralizing or, better yet, like ice water for chocolate" ("Hanging Out" 2). Therefore, Anders's depiction of L.A. Chicano/a gangs may, to a certain extent, perpetuate stereotypes about the barrio, while, at the same time, indicating certain issues and problems within this community that should be challenged and overcome.

As far as the "fatalistic or nihilistic" (Hollinger 196) ending is concerned, Hollinger reiterates what Fregoso suggests in her review of *Mi Vida Loca*, maintaining that "the film's ambivalent ending seems to represent instead a realistic, thought-provoking attempt to show that the problems with which it deals are in reality far from solved" (Hollinger 196). Mona's last words indicate that the homegirls from Echo Park "have assumed a position of agency and refuse to remain passive victims of their environment" (Hollinger 196), even if "the direction they have adopted is presented as fraught with mortal danger" (Hollinger 196), as is confirmed by the shooting at the end of the film. It can be considered a disadvantage that *Mi Vida Loca* does not have an optimistic ending, but it also testifies to Anders's refusal to end the film with either a happy or a completely

tragic ending. Instead, Anders chooses an "in-between" alternative with the portrayal of "women who have the energy and determination to change their lives, yet are tragically caught in a cycle of violence that their romanticized worldview only works to support" (Hollinger 196). Therefore, Anders avoids a simplistic approach and "opts for a complex and ambiguous ending that seems intended to open up a discourse on women's position in gang culture rather than merely offering a blindly affirmative statement of female solidarity that would in effect shut this type of discourse down" (Hollinger 196). The director realizes that the situation of homegirls cannot be categorized through popular dichotomies, hence the film cannot have a definitive and closed ending. Consequently, the way Anders concludes *Mi Vida Loca* should not be considered solely as fatalistic, as such an interpretation of Anders's approach is limited, disregarding other ideas she points to with such an ending.

However, apart from the two major accusations mentioned above, other aspects of Anders's representation of homegirls can be criticized as well. This substantial critique has come from the Chicano/a community and gang members themselves. While both mainstream and Chicano/a critics have criticized *Mi Vida Loca* "as a paternalistic and voyeuristic investigation of what is presented as an 'alien' subculture" (Hollinger 193), Rosa Linda Fregoso, as a representative of the Chicano/a community, focuses on another aspect, namely Anders's "inability to capture the substance of Chicana gang culture" (Hollinger 194). She argues that the plot relies too much on Anders's "own autobiographical experiences to form her stories" (qtd. in Hollinger 194), which includes the subplot about a love affair between La Blue Eyes and a prison inmate, or the Suavecito theme. As she maintains, this "reliance on non-Chicano/a material led Anders to distort the lifestyle of the Chicana homegirls she was trying to portray by reducing them merely to 'pretexts for [her] own fantasies'" (qtd. in Hollinger 194).

Homegirls watching the film during the SFIFF also considered that issue to be problematic. They did not share the critique of mainstream critics, with their emphasis on the distorted picture of homegirls that Anders presented in *Mi Vida Loca*. Instead, as Marie "Keta" Miranda explains, they protested against "the cultural logic that Anders seemed to have missed" (1). They objected to the idea of female rivalry over men and also challenged the way in which the homegirl life had been depicted by Anders. They considered Anders's portrayals to be unrealistic because she misinterpreted "what it means to be a gang member: the variety of girls who join, issues of protection and loyalty, the gang as a voluntary association" (Miranda 1). Some other gang members noticed that in coming up with the theme of gang rivalry over an expensive custom truck "Anders entirely misses the point of gang warfare" (Hollinger 194), as in most cases such fights are conducted out of economic reasons or over dominance in certain areas and

neighborhoods, including turf wars. Therefore, the girls addressed three major issues they disagreed with and argued that: "1) Homegirls don't get pregnant from the same guy, they have more respect than that; 2) A homeboy does not obsess over a lowrider truck at the expense of his kids; 3) Rival gangs fight over turf, never over a car" (qtd. in Fregoso, "Hanging Out" 2).

In addition to the criticism mentioned above, Anders has also been accused of some other acts of negligence; for example Hollinger argues that she "completely overlooks the importance of intergenerational female relationships in Chicana culture" (194). The truth is that viewers barely see any representatives of the older generation at all. Mousie's mother appears at the beginning of Sad Girl's story, which is in retrospect to the girls' childhood. Then Mousie's father is shown when he learns about her pregnancy, after which he tells her to move out of the house. Consequently, when Maribel moves in to live with Ernesto the viewer gets to know his grandmother. There is also one more scene where Mona's father appears briefly and, apart from that, representatives of the older generation are present only at the funerals of community members.

Such an underrepresentation of intergenerational networks provides the viewer with a distorted picture of the community, as these relationships are extremely important for survival in the barrio and it seems that Anders's personal experience once again influences her portrayal of the community she presents. As Hollinger criticizes, "Anders seems to have projected onto the homegirls' lives the lack of parental guidance she found in her own life" (194) because "[i]n interviews, for instance, she has stated that she identified with her young female characters because she felt she shared with them a lack of parental presence" (Hollinger 194). Consequently, Anders portrays the homegirls from Echo Park as teenage girls who have been left completely to themselves and cannot rely on any mature or adult person, even in the most difficult circumstances of their lives. Moreover, through such a portrayal of the community the director disregards informal bonds that verge on kinship, often existing in such communities due to the shared plight and common grievances people suffer and, consequently, the need to provide support for each other. As a result, a very important aspect of the Chicano/a community is left ignored and inadequately represented in the film.

The last aspect that needs to be mentioned in this part of the critique is Anders's representation of the role of gangs for women and the role of women in gangs. Marie "Keta" Miranda, talking about the role of *pachucas* and homegirls, indicates their importance for challenging "cultural nationalist concepts of community by re-creating forms of feminine Chicana solidarity through bonds of friendship, solidarity and mutual trust" (in Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters* 96), whereas Catherine Ramirez emphasizes that these women "formed alternative national identities challenging sexual and gender norms, transgressing gender norms,

thwarting behaviors and expectations, defying dominant boundaries of domesticity and femininity" (in Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters* 96). This role of gangs is also noticed by Brown, who indicates that one of the effects of female gang membership is "challenging and complicating the traditional relegation of women to the private sphere" (85). By entering the street and transgressing the private-public division "girls in gangs are able to find female-dominated spaces that allow for alternative constructions of femininity and community that are not controlled by males" (Mendoza-Denton 162). Some of these aspects of gang life are present in *Mi Vida Loca*, especially on the example of Giggles's resolutions and her attempts to unite homegirls for the cause. It can also be seen in the case of Whisper, who wants to start her own operation, earning money to support herself as well as help out her friends. Finally, Mona's last commentary also indicates that the homegirls from Echo Park are going to take matters into their own hands. Nevertheless, these are just isolated examples of some female individuals' approach to life and it seems that the potentially liberating role of the gang remains underappreciated in the film.

In analyzing various aspects of the representation of homegirls in *Mi Vida Loca*, it seems that Anders's presentation of the homegirl life in L.A. distorts the reality of barrio life; and a Hollywood story about Echo Park has little to do with real experience of life in East L.A. However, some of the accusations mentioned above can be (and have been) challenged, if not refuted. First of all, Anders herself has addressed the issue of Mona's plausibility as well as Maribel's conflict. During the San Francisco International Film Festival she admitted that her consultants from the gang rejected the main plotline with Mousie – Sad Girl's rivalry over Ernesto (Fregoso, "Hanging Out" 2). Nevertheless, she also admitted she had heard the story about girls fighting over a boy and "made it the major plot of the film because she was concerned about the divisions among women that arise because of men" (Fregoso, "Hanging Out" 2). Therefore, the conflict over Ernesto was meant to serve a specific purpose—through the depiction of this fight Anders wanted to illustrate how fighting over boys can impair the bonds between women, destroying their solidarity and weakening the power of sisterhood.

The problem with capturing the essence of the Chicana gang experience as well as the inauthenticity of Echo Park's portrayal have also been countered by Susan Dever, who has provided both the opinions of her friends and the homegirls she interviewed. Quoting their commentary, she notes:

> While Mona's (Angel Aviles) and Maribel's (Seidy Lopez) story in Act I has inspired fierce debate in academic and journalistic circles, Act II's protagonist, Giggles (Marlo Marron), who struggles to find work after serving an undeserved prison sentence, has been greeted with a curious silence. Elena, my friend Esperanza's twenty-year-old niece, explained the lack of attention this way: '[Critics] either

> didn't even notice what was going on with a woman trying to get a job when that's almost impossible, or else they did see and it made'em nervous that Chicanas are gonna take over business like we're supposedly taking over L.A.' (128)

Therefore, according to Dever, criticism should not be focused so much on the question of the (un)reality of Sad Girl and Mousie's conflict, since, in this way, some other important aspects of the film, like the aforementioned issue of Chicana liberation, might remain unnoticed or become diluted.

The accusation regarding the underrepresentation of intergenerational bonds in the Chicano/a community and family has also been challenged by Dever and homegirls themselves. Dever observes that because there are different family models and relationships represented in the film, it cannot be argued that Anders completely disregards the ties of sisterhood and support between different generations of Chicanas. Instead, her specific presentation of such bonds rather serves a specific purpose. Dever explains:

> Some of *Mi Vida Loca*'s families are troubled; some are not. We learned in Act I that Maribel's parents aren't much of a resource. Her too-young, impoverished dad (played in ironic cameo by Kid Frost) throws her out of the house when she becomes pregnant, but she eventually finds comfort with Ernesto's grandmother. Mona's father, a Mexican immigrant and Elvia Rivero fan, represents another kind of family, a compassionate widower in a loving relationship with his daughter.... Act II introduces Rachel (Bertilla Damas), Whisper's thirty-something married sister. Her presence is key, and surpasses the largely symbolic roles of the other parental figures. A former gang member herself, Rachel has left the hardship of *la vida loca* to move with her police lieutenant husband (Ric Salinas) toward the middle class. Pregnant with her own incipient family, she mothers Whisper, doctors the young woman when she becomes wounded by gunshot, and cautions her sister's friends against the kind of violence that took the life of their brother, Creeper. During the four years their sister-in-law Giggles has been 'locked up in prison for something stupid she didn't even do,' as Whisper recounts in voice-over, Rachel has acted as full-time mother to her niece, who is Creeper and Giggles's child. A tattooed madonna, Rachel replaces traditional melodramas' proverbial *madrecita abnegada*. She is the image of the 'older, compassionate, and understanding wom[a]n' who, despite Fregoso's claims regarding the absence of such women in the film, has 'resisted and survived *'la vida dura'*' in order to sustain her extended family. (148)

These examples provided by Dever indicate that Anders does present various generations of Chicana women and the different bonds between them. However, "there is no mythification of *la sagrada familia*" (Dever 147) in *Mi Vida Loca* and that may be the reason why Anders's representation of *la familia* and the

role of sisterhood came under criticism. This conclusion is also supported by one of the homegirls whom Susan Dever interviews. In this interview, Carmen, homegirl from L.A., admits that even though homegirls notice extended families formed by different gang members, critics are, in fact, looking for another "*Mi familia* movie" (Dever 151), with a specific portrayal of the Chicana lifestyle, family, and relationships. Therefore, when Anders's representations do not meet their expectations or ideas about these institutions, they cannot accept her approach.

Finally, the criticism of the representation of homegirls, expressed in Chicano/a circles, can be explained by the fact that Anders is both a (partial) insider to the barrio and an outsider at the same time. She worked hard on her project and was meticulous as well as diligent in preparation for the film. However, her ambivalent position as a person who used to live in the barrio, but at the same time is a white woman, a director, not a Chicana, and eventually, a person who moved out of the barrio a few years before, somehow predestines her to be treated with suspicion by insiders. Dever acknowledges this ambivalence when she grants Anders due respect for her diligence in tracing "external particularities of one's culture," while at the same time pronouncing the director's failure "to capture the essence of that culture" which, according to her, leads to a "very alienating experience" (200).

However, such conclusions were only partially shared by homegirls and younger Latinas/Chicanas during the screening of the film at the San Francisco International Film Festival (SFIFF) in 1994. The screening evoked disagreements between the critics and homegirls invited to watch the film. The two groups focused on completely different aspects in their criticism, with the homegirls not supporting the critique of Anders as an outsider per se (Miranda 2). Young Latinas/Chicanas who reviewed the film online did not support this criticism, either. Instead, customer reviews have praised *Mi Vida Loca* for its depiction of life in Echo Park[5] and have recommended it "to anyone and everyone who wants to learn about chicana [sic] gangs" (www.endomusic.com).

5 For example, "miami" describes the films as follows: "i think this movie is one of the best chicana films out there.. i grew up in echo parc for 6 years of my life.. and im only 15 now and echo parc is really like this i mean its crazy i mean [it]...exaggerates a lil at some stuff but it mostly speaks the truth about how growing up chicana isnt all fun.. its hard and its even harder growing up in the barrio and that you gotta go thru stuggles and you cant let noone get you down and you have to be proud of what you. i think this movie is one of the best movie out there..and the names LMAO barrio gangs really have names like that my bestfriend's name is Sadgirl and they call me Gigglez.. in our locas.." (www.endomusic.com).

All in all, while the representation of Chicana gangs in *Mi Vida Loca* certainly lacks multiple perspectives and misses some points, the viewer should take into account the challenges Anders faced in making the first commercial film on gangs, which has also been reflected in the aforementioned reactions to the film. Examining Anders's representation of the homegirl life, it needs to be remembered that as the director of the first commercial and mainstream film on Chicana homegirls, Anders had many challenges to face. Considering that the film has, to a large extent, served the purpose of presenting the specific community of Echo Park and its inhabitants from a sympathetic angle, as "*Mi Vida Loca*'s intimate portraits of individuals within communities humanize the media-embattled barrios" (Dever 127). What also has to be considered is the fact that Anders's film is not a documentary on female gangs per se but an artistic creation, which certainly does not allow the presentation of distorted images but at the same time prevents documentary-like representation of Chicana homegirls. Moreover, it is significant that Anders developed *Mi Vida Loca* into a broader cultural project, organizing "benefit screenings to fund scholarships for local youth" (Dever 135), in this manner repaying the community that helped her create the script. As a result, according to Dever, "[b]y linking Anders's role in her community with filmic evidence of interaction, we can better appreciate how the film—and the filmmakers—conceive of 'getting along' in multicultural Los Angeles" (135). Anders herself testified to that, claiming that her goal in making the film was "to humanize people who don't get represented on the screen" (qtd. in Hollinger 201). Therefore, as Hollinger suggests in her conclusions about *Mi Vida Loca*, it is important that a project like this has been created, as it draws attention to the issue of female gangs and as such "should not be ignored simply because its director refuses to pander to mainstream tastes by offering a fantasy ending and providing easy identification with characters" (201). Moreover, she continues, "[i]t should also not be rejected by the Chicano/a community simply because Anders let her own experiences interfere too much with her presentation of another culture. There are too few filmic treatments of intraethnic female friendship for one that achieves so much to be so readily dismissed" (Hollinger 201).

To sum up, it should be remembered that Anders's project has both assets and disadvantages. It is true that her depiction of life in East L.A. is consistent and comprehensive; nevertheless, at times the Hollywood story of Echo Park does not exactly reflect the reality of the barrio. Therefore, based on the analysis of *Mi Vida Loca* and various responses to the film one may come to the conclusion that new texts and films are needed to do away with one-sided perspectives in order to "disrupt monolithic national culture that creates delinquent citizens" (Brown xxvii) and "resist homogenizing notions of Chicana gang life" (Brown xxxiv). These new texts and projects should reveal a diversity of motifs behind joining

the gang—"on community, individual and situational levels" (Valdez 8–9). They should also show how gang membership "crosses boundaries between private and public" (Miranda 79), how the street can be "a site of negotiations and transactions between private and public" (Miranda 81) and how participation in a gang allows one to "disrupt domestic roles and expectations" (Miranda 82), indicating in particular how "homosocial bonding in adolescence provides freedom from the social expectations of marriage" (Miranda 95; Valdez 3) and how this idea of *comadrazgo* becomes "an interstitial or liminal space before the actualization of the gendered 'compulsive heterosexual' social roles" (Miranda 103). Finally, they should depict "patriarchal dynamics that render [women] invisible" (Brown xxxiv) and postulate the need to "change the system from within" (Brown 107). All these aspects should be taken into consideration, otherwise there is a risk that new projects will perpetuate overgeneralizations, oversimplifications and distorted images of certain groups and communities. In the case of *Mi Vida Loca*, maybe the screening of the film should be accompanied by watching *It's a Homie Thang!*, "a distinctive auto-ethnographic documentary about girls in gangs" with its "major message to be dialectic of difference and similarity—we are not like you/we are like you" (Miranda 5). Such an approach would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the problem of gangs in the U.S. and in this way, as López-Calvo suggests, "Latina writing and filmmaking" could "symbolically claim (public) space not only from hegemonic social groups but also from men in their own community" (122). Nevertheless, regardless of the aforementioned arguments, it is worth watching *Mi Vida Loca*, because despite its drawbacks it does contribute to the discourse on female gangs in the U.S.

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Karolina Słotwińska

The Rising Multitude: Zombie Invasion and the Problem of Biopolitics in Max Brooks's *World War Z*

Abstract: This essay outlines the transnational history of the zombie, arguing for the figure's revolutionary potential. Approaching the zombie as a complex social practice, I recall its ritualistic African and Haitian roots, the figure's transposition from Haitian folklore into American ethnographic writings, and its later Hollywood reconfigurations. Insisting on the zombie's proto-biopolitical character, I propose to see the figure's continued cultural currency as predicated on its articulation of political dynamics in the globalized world. Noting the historically inscribed rebellious potential of the zombie, I hold that the newest zombie novels suggest that the zombie horde can be seen as a new political subject in the era of late capitalism—the multitude, heralded by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. The transnational nature of the zombie multitude is explored in this essay in the context of Max Brooks's *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006), which capitalizes on the possible awareness-raising potential of the modern pop-cultural evocations of the zombie.

Keywords: zombie, invasion, multitude, biopolitics, Max Brooks, *World War Z*

In October 2010 the news of a cholera outbreak in Haiti spread across the world. Devastated by an earthquake only ten months earlier, the country was unable to stave off the epidemic, which as of November, 2014 has affected more than 700,000 people, claiming over 8,500 lives (Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Population). Recalling his experience of the outbreak for Partners In Health—a non-profit health organization, Dr. Charles Patrick Almazor, a Haitian, wrote in 2013:

> The patients—the lucky ones who were taken to a clinic—were transported by family and community members on traditional stretchers, a straw mat on an iron bed supported by two thick sticks and carried by four men. Our patients' eyes were sunken into their skulls, their skin as parched as the dry season. Because of their appearance, they were referred to as *zombi lage*, fleeing zombies. Patients of all ages laid [*sic*] on their cots, throwing up what they hardly found to eat, since for most of them food is a scarce resource. ("Reflecting on the Cholera Outbreak in Haiti")

In this account of human suffering, the reader finds a striking evocation of what any American will immediately identify as a stock horror figure—the gruesome plague bearer of the US entertainment industry. Yet this process of identification is complicated by the references to lacking infrastructure, dire poverty and the physical ordeal of cholera victims, which ground the zombie in a more tragic setting.

Interestingly, the seemingly atypical association has its roots in Haitian folklore, where rather than as the industrial ghoul, the zombie functions as a captive of enslaving sorcery; either a body raised from the dead or a captured spirit that can be stored in a bottle, it is a servant, whose services depend on the maintenance of specific rituals by its master. If not properly cared for, this dehumanized figure is nonetheless capable of rebelling and escaping. The cholera-stricken patients of Dr. Almazor's account are cast precisely in this role of the defiant zombies—harried yet seeking deliverance from the dehumanizing disease.

In this way, Dr. Almazor's article hints at an interestingly kaleidoscopic cultural optics at work in the modern world. By linking social realities with medical concerns and pop-cultural productions, this optics brings together the imaginations of Haitians and Americans, consequently unsettling their geopolitical and cultural insulation. Indeed, the cultural and political walls separating the more economically developed countries from those less developed begin to crumble when we turn to further investigate the figure of the zombie. In fact, the convoluted history of this popular monster unveils the porous geopolitical structure of global society. In this essay, I outline the transnational history of the zombie, arguing for its proto-biopolitical and hence performative character. Approaching the zombie as a complex social practice, I explain its continued cultural currency and relevance for the modern globalized world. To illustrate my point, I turn to one of the more famous zombie novels of the twenty-first century, Max Brooks's *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006), to capitalize on the possible awareness-raising and revolutionary potential of the modern pop-cultural evocations of the zombie.

A Brief History of Cultural Contagion

Despite being often referred to as "a fundamentally *American* creation" (Bishop 12), the zombie is in fact a product of African culture. Searching for its origins in the countries of West and Central Africa, Hans-W. Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier unearth a heterogeneous lexicon of words similar to *zombie*, which denote variously "the creator god of many Bantu people," cataleptic individuals, fetishes, corpses or bodies without souls, and spirits or revenants (Ackermann and Gauthier

467–469). The zombie seems thus to be grounded in pre-Bantu-migration West or Central Africa and retains strong links with the Kongo religion. The latter, like Haitian Vodou, sees the soul and body as animated by a "force [that] can inhabit objects and animals as well as human beings," and that can thus be employed as a technology of power (MacGaffey 13). This technology is, crucially, a ritualistic practice instrumental in the establishment of power relations among the BaKongo (the Kongo people, a Bantu group), specifically the division into those powerless, including inhuman zombies, and those in power—again not only humans, but also "objects" such as *minkisi* (MacGaffey 13). *Minkisi*, identified by Elizabeth McAlister as "one of the cultural sources of the zonbi" ("Slaves" 463), are often misinterpreted as fetishes, or objects infused with personhood, but according to Wyatt MacGaffey, they constitute rather "ritual complexes" (12). MacGaffey's views on *minkisi* help shed some light on the related notion of the zombie:

> instead of asking why BaKongo and other Africans violate the Cartesian distinction between persons and objects, we might note that among ourselves (in the capitalist West) the distinction between real rights and personal rights, between things and persons, is not given in nature but in law.... To begin to translate and understand Kongo rituals... is to recognize how deeply our own thought is embedded in praxis[.] (14–15)

Minkisi and zombies need thus to be seen as illustrative of social (contractual) construction of life—so powerful as to collapse distinctions between human subjects and objects.

We see a variant of the same process of collapsing distinctions between persons and things in the Western society, notably in the institution of slavery. Interestingly, figures of former slaves are also the reference for the earliest nineteenth-century records of the word *zombie* in the West. One of the sources mentions Zumbi of Palmares (Southey 24), the courageous leader of a seventeenth-century slave settlement and presently a national hero in Brazil, where the anniversary of his death is celebrated as the Day of Black Awareness. Another source evokes Jean Zombi—a mulatto officer during the Haitian Revolution, later included among the lwa, or spirits of the Vodou religion (Dayan 36–37). But simultaneously, the docile zombie slave stories appear in the United States. In the US newspaper reprints of the 1838 British short story "The Unknown Painter" the zombie figures as a ghost of African folklore, a figurative representation of the story's mulatto protagonist—Sebastian Gomez (Kordas 16–17). Strikingly, as a fictionalized account of the discovery of a famous seventeenth-century Spanish painter's talent, Gomez's story complements the stories of Zumbi of Palmares and Jean Zombi, all of which recount the passage from the economically determined objecthood of the slave to historical and political agency. These nineteenth-century Western zombie tales

begin to articulate the formation of a culture of the Atlantic diaspora and the disoriented transnational agency of subaltern people.

Such a positive reading of the zombie obviously contrasts with the figure's identification with a brainless (but craving for brains) walking corpse. In fact, it is only at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the wake of the US occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), that American travelers, notably William Seabrook, and ethnographers, such as Zora Neale Hurston, introduce the American public to the gruesome living dead. The new incarnation of the zombie is thus a result of a culture clash between two former slave colonies that leads to the interpenetration of disparate cultural realities. Having encountered in Haiti the tales of utilizing the souls of the dead, both Seabrook and Hurston read it through the distinctly American lens and construe the resurrected dead chiefly as victims—be it victims of greed-driven Haitian sorcerers, Haitian culture (Seabrook) or the Haitian social order (Hurston). Although by emphasizing the contractual character of zombification, which casts human life in the context of economic exchange, Hurston does succeed in de-exoticizing the zombie to some extent, she fails to capitalize on how "the living take charge of their history when they mimetically perform master-slave relationships with spirits of the dead" ("Slaves" 464). Likewise, both Hurston and Seabrook take no notice of the "morally benign" or neutral uses of zombies e.g. for healing, and occlude the zombie's potential for rebellion.[1]

Indeed, it is only as a slave, whose status is sanctioned by the sinister Haitian religion, that the zombie enters Hollywood through such horror movies as *White Zombie* (1932) or *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). Although instrumental in the establishment of some of the most common zombie movie conventions, these cinematic depictions of the theme center on the zombie-master, to whom all the attributes of the monstrous slave-owner are ascribed. By combining Haitian folklore with the European monster tradition and American political concerns, these productions pave the way for Americanocentric reworkings of the zombie motif in the latter part of the century.

It is with George Romero's movie *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) that the zombie becomes fully integrated into US culture. The movie eschews the zombie-master figure as well as explicit references to other countries, instead confining the action to the US countryside. There, a group of survivors (white, except for the main protagonist) is pitted against a horde of the resurrected and human-eating dead. Interestingly, in the movie the rise of the cannibalistic dead

1 We find in Hurston no mention of such attitudes as the one expressed in an interview with Elizabeth McAlister by one *bòkò* (Vodou practitioner), who maintained that he would have nothing against becoming a zombie (a captivated spirit), since "if you take the *zonbi* of someone who liked to work, they feel happy because they didn't like to sit around doing nothing" ("Spirits" 105).

is purported to be the result of cosmic radiation transferred on board of a NASA explorer satellite—a rationale that places Romero's monsters within the tradition of 1950s science-fiction movies that evoked the political menace of communist invasion (Bishop 101). Still, even though they are never referred to as zombies, the living dead in *The Night* fit the zombie tradition not only due to the Romero's (apparently unintended) use of zombie-movie conventions such as the white catatonic woman victim, the characteristic zombie walk, or the unsettling close-ups of eyes (referencing *White Zombie*), but also due to the movie's foregrounding of the issue of race relations through its focus on the assertive Black American protagonist Ben (Duane Jones). *The Night* comments on the confrontation between the country's calcified racist politics and the rising multitude of black civilians fighting for legal equality within the Civil Rights Movement and African American militancy (Bishop 21–22). This reconfiguration once again shows how because it is predicated on the performative vision of human agency vis-à-vis the power system, the zombie continually proves a potent convention for articulating the power-subject dynamics.

Indeed, with the advent of the 1980s and the emergence of the often dismissed genre of splatstick zombie comedy, the zombie transforms into a figure of outrageous pop-cultural performativity (Bishop 181). Along with the corporeally fixated and visually-conscious cyberpunk, splatstick taps onto the offensive-rebel sensibility of the adolescent generation of the 1980s. For Kyle William Bishop, the narrowly articulate yet grisly zombies of Dan O'Bannon's hip *The Return of the Dead* (1985; developed into a series of five movies), who divulge that they eat brains to alleviate the pain of being dead, prepare the ground for thinking about zombie subjectivity as they "deflect the horror of zombies through both humor and satire" (Bishop 181). In other words, owing to the arrival of splatstick, zombies can be finally simply fun.

Accordingly, the late twentieth and the early twenty-first century abound in both funny and scary zombie productions. These range from survival horror games (*Resident Evil, Dead Island*, *Last of Us*), horror movies such as Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002), zombie comedies such as *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), or *Zombieland* (2009), and even novels both in the horror (e.g. Jonathan Maberry's *Patient Zero* from 2009) or the satirical tradition (Max Brooks's *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead* from 2003, or Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* from 2009). What is characteristic for these newest zombie practices, interestingly, is the focus on the zombie as a biological creature, a subject for medical examination, but also a strange biological force. To an extent, zombie narratives merge with the killer virus and medical thriller fiction that erupted in the 1990s. Enveloped in the epidemiological shroud, the newest zombie productions reimagine the threat posed by the zombie as the problem of

contagion, in other words a biopolitical danger befitting the age of transnational politics.

An old-fashioned medical term derived from the Latin *contagio* "a touching, contact" and denoting "interpersonal transmission of infectious microorganisms" (Pernick 859), contagion still holds powerful cultural resonance as a term for dangerous penetration of self's boundaries. An invasive mechanism of pathological replication, it reflects the movement of appropriation by the Other. Consequently, as the defining mode of being of the modern zombie horde, the mechanism links notions of biological life and subjugation, calling for the consideration of biopolitical status of modern existence.

Biopolitics of the Zombie

The above abridged outline of the many evocations of the zombie illustrates its astonishing malleability in the face of changing political conditions. This malleability seems to be predicated on the ritualistic or performative nature of the zombie, which reveals how the different systems of power work. But what does that mean?

When Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry observe in their tongue-in-cheek zombie manifesto that the zombie questions the subject/object division by holding it "irrevocably in tension" (94), they effectively criticize the narrowly ontological considerations of the figure. The zombie must, in contrast, be seen not as this or that thing, but as the proper subject for ethics and politics. Be it as the Haitian zombie, the result of zombification ritual, or as the modern plague-carrier which incarnates the mechanism of infection, the zombie helps articulate interpersonal and political dynamics, mapping the field of human agency. As such the zombie is a powerful proto-biopolitical figure and to explain this idea, we need to turn to the work of Michel Foucault.

Foucault coined the term *biopolitics* to explain a transformation of power that had taken place in the latter part of the eighteenth century in the West (242). The roots of this change could be found in the increased pressure exercised on the state apparatuses by the growing masses of subjects, the development of statistics, as well as the economization of life. Political subjects began to be considered not as individuals, or bodies to be disciplined by the state apparatus, but rather as a population. The new technology of power has addressed itself to "a global mass... affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on" (Foucault 242–243). Relying on the science of statistics, biopower now intervenes at the level of population, introducing mechanisms of regulation and normalization of life of its citizens, in this way governing the global mass (Foucault 249).

The development of this global society, the proper subject of biopolitics, is interwoven with the transnational history of the zombie. Not only is the zombie a product of power's hold over the fluidity of life, or life understood as transmissible force (in Haitian religion), but in its newest interpretations as contagion it discloses the dynamics at work in the global society. Fittingly, the story of cross-cultural appropriation of the zombie culminates in modern times in the emergence of the character of the zombie horde, or the biopolitical nightmare, that devours everything in its way. Yet it is this zombie horde, with its historically-inscribed rebellious potential, that can be seen as bearing the seed of yet another political transformation, for according to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, we are now witnessing the emergence of a new political subject—the diversified multitude (xiii).

The multitude, only hazily outlined by the two authors, can be seen as more clearly articulated in the modern zombie science fiction. Largely due to its legacy as the literature that addressed the problems of the emergent democracy at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that subsequently transformed into popular (mass) fiction in the twentieth century, science fiction has proven to be a potent vehicle for the consideration of the growing biopolitical sensibility in the West. In order to analyze how said biopolitical sensibility helps us envisage the rebellious multitude, it behooves us to look at Max Brooks's *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (2006). The novel, I argue, capitalizes on the limits of modern nation-state politics and raises questions of the status and agency of the modern political subject. Showing how transnational dynamics transforms the world, *World War Z* manages to posit an interesting perspective on global politics.

Zombie War

Blending zombie comedy and multicultural perspective, *World War Z* continues the multifaceted tradition of zombie fiction. Using the uncommon form of oral history, or a collection of interviews with survivors from different countries, Brooks's narrator recounts the course of a zombie pandemic from its outbreak in a remote village in China, through its rapid escalation into a global emergency and its apparent ultimate suppression. *World War Z* aligns itself with Brooks's first zombie novel *The Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) in its mock-serious treatment of the zombie plague, but it also expands the premise of that first book into a fully-fledged satire on international politics. In this satirical exploration of political mechanisms, *World War Z* echoes the proto-science fiction writings of such writers as Jonathan Swift, who in his mock-travelogue *Gulliver's Travels* satirized

early modern politics of his native country. *World War Z*'s caustic depiction of bureaucratic paralysis and multiple failings of national strategies devised to deal with a global health emergency clearly points to the inadequacy of state apparatuses to address global problems of this kind.

The novel's premise is set out already in its "Introduction" chapter, from which the reader learns how the zombie crisis over a decade earlier nearly eradicated the human race, as well as how the collection of interviews comprising the book came to be published. The publication, as it turns out, resulted from a conflict between the narrator-interviewer, employed by the UN to draft the "United Nation's [*sic*] Postwar Commission Report" recounting the course of the zombie pandemic, and the UN Commission's chair, for whom the majority of the data the narrator had gathered was "too intimate" for the purposes of an "after-action report" (Brooks 2). Arguing for the indispensability of what the chair referred to as "the human factor," the narrator insists on an ethical dimension of the inclusion of the personal perspective:

> By excluding the human factor, aren't we risking the kind of personal detachment from a history that may, heaven forbid, lead us one day to repeat it? And in the end, isn't the human factor the only true difference between us and the enemy we now refer to as 'the living dead'? (Brooks 3)

In this way, the "Introduction" chapter already stages for the reader the authority conflict that lies at the heart of *World War Z*: the clash of international political structure of nation-states and the subversive transnational character of human agency, which cannot be treated as a mere factor in biopolitical calculations.

And yet humanity is treated variously as a negligible or a manageable resource of national states throughout *World War Z*. We see this already in the first interview with a Chinese doctor, Kwang Jingshu, who recounts the story of his encounter with the first victims of the zombie plague, the inhabitants of the village of New Dachang. Significantly, the outbreak in New Dachang is traced back to the village's troubled geohistory. Originally located in an area designated for submersion after the erection of the Three Gorges Dam[2] on the Yangtze River, the village has been relocated by the authorities and rebuilt as a museum, with no concern for its former inhabitants. Forced to eke out a living in the vicinity of the museum and the submerged area, the inhabitants of Dachang have turned to diving into the dam reservoir in hopes of reclaiming some of their goods, and it is from one of such excursions that one boy returns marked with a strange bite (Brooks 8).

2 The world's largest power station, Three Gorges Dam is an actual building whose construction (started in 1994 and completed in 2012) demanded relocation of more than 1.2 million people and has raised many controversies among ecologists.

The plague thus emerges out of the economic misery of the subaltern population. Having been treated as part of the landscape that can be altered according to the central government's vision, the inhabitants of New Dachang turn into a different, nightmarish kind of element—the zombie horde.

Exhibiting the permeability of a virus, zombies then spread to different countries by both legal and illegal means. The latter include, for instance, illegal transplants of organs garnered from Eastern countries (including China). The story of Fernando Oliveira, a doctor carrying out such transplants, furnishes one of the more horrifying explanations for the spread of the plague that indicts Western society's callous attitude toward the rest of the world. Similarly indicting is Nury Televaldi's story of how he would smuggle the Chinese to different countries in the early days of the epidemic. Televaldi's explanation for why people chose to flee to the West testifies to the dramatic consequences of the world division:

> [The Interviewer:] You say they didn't call for a doctor, that they were afraid they'd be sent back, but then why try to find a cure in the West?
> [Televaldi:] You really don't understand a refugee's heart, do you? These people were desperate. They were trapped between their infections and being rounded up and "treated" by their own government. If you had a loved one, a family member, a child, who was infected, and you thought there was a shred of hope in some other country, wouldn't you do everything in your power to get there? (Brooks 14)

Televaldi's ultimate remark that those who had been smuggled "simply melted into the host country's underbelly" or "First World ghettos" serves only to underscore the uncanny connection between the poor and zombies (Brooks 15).

This link becomes all the more strongly pronounced in the nation-states' varied but unchangingly short-sighted initial responses to the news of the zombie outbreak. If the Chinese attempt to cover up their outbreaks, the Americans, suspecting a ploy on the part of China, first trivialize the problem, acknowledging some danger only later, and even then limiting their response to the deployment of the so-called Alpha teams tasked with eliminating plague carriers "with extreme prejudice" (Brooks 51). A more comprehensive approach, one involving mobilization of national resources and, possibly, a less isolationist tactic, is never implemented; instead, to calm the increasingly panicked society, the US government backs the sale of a fake vaccine, Phalanx, and only when the plague starts to actually ravage the US soil do the authorities begin to act.

But the actions undertaken are misdirected. Faced with an immediate biological threat, the US government still fails to conceive of the nature of the zombie and confronts the plague as if it were an enemy, deciding to undertake military action. The Battle of Yonkers, set to be televised as the US Army's spectacular

victory over the zombie, proves to be a "catastrophic failure of the modern military apparatus" (Brooks 103). The gruesome description of the effects of a thermobaric bomb deployed as a last recourse in the battle cannot fail to remind one of the effects of the ill-famed application of chemical weapon in Second Battle of Ypres. But for Todd Wainio, a survivor and veteran of the battle, Yonkers is a massacre comparable primarily with Little Bighorn—the defeat of the US Army by combined forces of the subaltern Native Americans.[3]

The jarring inadequacy of the nation-states' approach underscores a kind of bureaucratic automatism that leads national authorities to employ war logic in the face of a global emergency. This kind of interventionist tactic operates within the field disciplinary power, which takes the body as the focus of the technology of power. Such a disciplinary approach fails to account for the zombie's fluid status. The grotesque depiction of the battle with waves of zombies never stopping to emerge anew is thus a powerful illustration of a clash of planes: the calcified nation-state structure and transnational agency, whose epiphenomenon is the zombie.

In fact, the zombie needs to be understood as enacting certain revolutionary dynamic changing the face of the world. As the spread of the zombie shows, global space cannot be seen as synonymous with international space—space parceled by nation-state sovereignty and mapped by borders, whether natural or artificial. Global space, as the theater where the history plays itself out, has to be understood as the space of economic, biopolitical and other flows, and hence a social practice. As Henri Lefebvre explains, "[l]ike all social practice, spatial practice is lived directly before it is conceptualized; but the speculative primacy of the conceived over the lived causes practice to disappear along with life" (34). In *World War Z*, in turn, this speculative primacy is reversed and it is the *lived* experience of space, both the practice of noxious divisions and the current imploding those divisions, that gains primary importance.

The late realization of the role of this spatial practice leads national governments to atrocious as much as successful eugenic resettlement plans inspired by a document known as the Redeker Plan. An Afrikaner, Paul Redeker[4] is the author of the revised "Orange Eighty-Four" Plan—"the doomsday scenario for the country's white minority, the plan to deal with an all-out uprising of its indig-

3 Yet not only the US, but also other countries undertake disastrous actions in the wake of the plague. Ahmed Farahnakian, formerly a major in the Iranian Revolution Guards Corps Air Force, tells the narrator how the inability to control the stream of refugees from Pakistan escalated into a nuclear conflict between Iran and Pakistan, which left him stateless.

4 The reader meets him in his guarded cell in a psychiatric hospital. Following acknowledgement by Nelson Mandela, the man, who is apparently not the devil incarnate, suffered a psychotic breakdown and has assumed a different personality.

enous African population" (Brooks 106). When the zombie epidemic begins to take over South Africa, Redeker is called by none other than Nelson Mandela and asked to present his zombie emergency plan, which, unsurprisingly, amounts to a transposition of the earlier Orange Plan's eugenic approach. The Redeker Plan's main premise is that only a fraction of civilians is to be evacuated and placed in guarded safe zones:

> not only to provide a labor pool for the eventual wartime economic restoration, but also to preserve the legitimacy and stability of the government, to prove to those already within the zone that their leaders were 'looking out for them'.… Those who were left behind were to be herded into special isolated zones. They were to be 'human bait,' distracting the undead from following the retreating army to their safe zone. Redeker argued that these isolated, uninfected refugees must be kept alive, well defended and even resupplied, if possible, so as to keep the undead hordes firmly rooted to the spot. (Brooks 109)

In the cynical plan Redeker thus seeks to herd and manage not the zombies, but the country's civilian population who can, after all, be infected and can thus destabilize the political base of the nation-state. The zombie war, as it is called throughout *World War Z*, surfaces in fact as the permanent state of emergency to which a given national country's own civilian population is subjected.

The Redeker Plan effectively institutes a new kind of spatial practice, a Redeker camp. What is the status of this camp? For Giorgio Agamben, the concentration camp is central to the biopolitical constitution of power (123). The camp is the paradigm of biopolitical space—it exists outside the juridical system within which individuals possess inalienable human rights, and yet it is constitutive of the power of the state over its citizens (Agamben 168–169). The Redeker camps are in this light a poignant illustration of Agamben's further claim that "[t]he camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule" (168–169). They reflect the modern nation-states' treatment of citizens as a mere resource.

Yet in *World War Z* we also see another side of the resettlement camp—the refugee camps of Cuban and Israeli. The former were devised for the many predominantly US refugees, who had fled the zombie plague and arrived in Cuba. "Officially," we learn from Seryosha Garcia Alvarez, "the camps had been created to contain the spread of 'infection,' but that wasn't the kind spread by the dead" (Brooks 231). What thus entered Cuba were the seeds of democracy which, fuelled by the money from the country's weapon industry, launched a systemic transformation and democratic transition in Cuba. The strategy of Israel has proven equally transformative. Already in the early stages of the epidemic, following an evacuation from the entire occupied territory, the country granted asylum to

"any foreign-born Jew, any foreigner of Israeli-born parents, any Palestinian living in the formerly occupied territories, and any Palestinian whose family had once lived within the borders of Israel" (Brooks 37). As we learn from one Palestinian, Saladin Kader, the asylum-seekers were initially placed in refugee camps, but subsequently the pressure of the masses of these people resulted in the country's political transformation and the creation of the state of the Unified Palestine. For Israel and Cuba, two countries with a difficult heritage of biopolitical conflicts, the masses of refugees have turned out to be agents of democratic change.

It is toward this notion of mass-inspired democratic change that the novel appears to lean. Through its inclusion of the mosaic of testimonies, *World War Z* succeeds in bearing witness to a difficult and grotesque political process at work in the modern society. Juxtaposing the stories of those agents traditionally omitted from the grand narrative of history, the novel expands the Western perspective and forces the reader to think about the ethics of global world that need to take into account the subaltern and marginal agencies of refugees, mercenaries, smugglers, or even samurai *hibakusha* (survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings). The fact that the accounts of such persons are collected in an oral history is thus doubly significant: not only is the reference to oral history a deft comical gesture on the part of Brooks, since one can hardly imagine a creature more orally fixated and less articulate than a zombie; it is also instrumental in challenging established notions of history and politics. As historian Paul Thompson explains:

> Since the nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of authority, it is not surprising that the judgement of history has more often than not vindicated the wisdom of the powers that be. Oral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In so doing, oral history has radical implication for the social message of history as a whole. (6–7)

If it would obviously be ridiculous to argue that the oral history of the zombie war provides a more "realistic" perspective on the conflict, it is nonetheless true that *World War Z* throws the life of the under-classes right in the face of the Western citizen and manipulates the narrative in such a way as to problematize that citizen's comfortable detachment from global politics. In this, the novel mirrors the strategy employed by Dr. Almazor in his article on the actual cholera epidemic: it seeks to raise awareness and mobilize readers.

Painting a picture of global insurgency, Brooks simultaneously orients theoretical considerations of a new political subject, the multitude. As "the living alternative that grows within [global] Empire," the multitude is not a homogenizing force:

> rather it provides the possibility that, while remaining different, we discover the commonality that enables us to communicate and act together. The multitude... might thus be conceived as a network: an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common (Hardt and Negri xiii–xiv).

"Composed potentially of all the diverse figures of social production" this new agency capitalizes on the legacy of guerilla and survival tactics of subaltern people. Indeed, Lauro and Embry's dismissal of any liberatory potential of the zombie seems in this light premature: the dis-oriented citizens of the West have much to learn from the survivors of centuries of oppression. They can, for instance, learn to express themselves through kaleidoscopic narratives, which even though replete with stereotypes, succeed in inspiring the vast sections of society. They can, further, learn the performative tactics that rework the experience of subjugation by reenacting it.

But maybe the process has already started. Considering the annual global processions of zombie aficionados known as zombie walks and organized frequently for a charity cause, one cannot fail to marvel at the power that this circulating presence exercises over human imagination. But if our imaginations have been consumed by the zombie, perhaps it is time we acknowledge our own place in the horde. Then, it could maybe finally become the revolutionary multitude.

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REVIEWS

Nicolas Barreyre, Michael Heale, Stephen Tuck, and Cécile Vidal, eds. *Historians across Borders: Writing American History in a Global Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. 395 pages.

Globalization and internationalization of contemporary scholarship are processes of which academics are deeply aware, but which are often accepted rather unreflectively. *Historians across Borders: Writing American History in a Global Age* is an original and innovative book which explores the question of how the institutional and cultural factors shape the writing of American history in Europe. This carefully structured and well-balanced volume, the product of the cooperation of twenty-four scholars from eleven countries, offers a complex interpretation of the practice of American history by European scholars and the possible impact it has on American history in general.

Historians across Borders offers a skillfully drafted, multidimensional analysis of the overall state of American history of Europe and of its development in time, with each section of the book looking at a different general issue rather than focusing on a single national case. This structure gives a complex interpretation of the European practice of American history, but also leads to a few repetitions. In the first part, bearing the title "Historiography," the essay "Watersheds in Time and Place: Writing American History in Europe" by Michael Heale, Sylvia Hilton, Halina Parafianowicz, Paul Schor, and Maurizio Vaudagna contains a general overview of the (relatively slow and often problematic) development of American history in Europe as a field of research since the nineteenth century till the present day. It identifies the common patterns in the European historiography, and points to the significant moments in its chronological and spatial development (notably 1945, the mid-1970s, and the 1990s).

Part Two, "Structures and Context," focuses on the impact of European scholarship on U.S. history. The three chapters discuss, respectively, the significance of politics, institutions and academic structures, and audiences as the significant aspects which helped to forge the specific national shapes of European historiography of America. Chapter 3, "Institutions, Careers, and the Many Paths of U.S. History in Europe," by Max Edling, Vincent Michelot, Jörg Nagler, Sandra Scanlon, and Irmina Wawrzyczek, could be perhaps singled out here as a noteworthy attempt not only to provide a synthetic interpretation of the impact—sometimes

surprising—of the European institutions, job markets, and professional regulations on developments in the field of American history, but also as a brief introduction into the intricate workings of European academia, and even as a practical guide for aspiring young scholars.

The third part uses the findings of the essays in Part Two to identify the ways in which the features of the location where scholarship is done (its political, institutional and cultural specifics) can lead to reformulations of the established academic paradigms. Thus, Chapter 5 looks at the practice of comparative history in particular European countries and its recent evolution into transnational and global history. Chapter 6 offers a discussion of European research into diplomacy, migrations, and other forms of transatlantic connections, while in Chapter 7 Trevor Burnard and Cécile Vidal study the connections between the European locations of historians and their approaches to the basic conceptual frameworks of Early American history.

Part Four, "Perspectives from Elsewhere," widens the scope of the book even further. Four scholars, Thomas Bender from the U.S., Ivan Kurilla from Russia, Ian Tyrrell from Australia, and Natsuki Aruga from Japan, in their short essays reflect on the findings of the earlier chapters and provide more accounts of the internationalization of the practice of American history in different parts of the world. The authors of the two final essays, David E. Nye, who is an American historian working in Denmark, and François Furstenberg, a scholar of U.S. and French background resident in Canada, comment on how such transnational experience affected their own professional lives.

Historians across Borders is important both in showing how the European influences give new directions in American historiography and in pointing to the significance of place in the writing and teaching of history. It reminds the readers of the impact of various institutional and cultural issues on both education and research. The book stresses the unifying consequences of such factors as the dominant position of the English language in the academia, the growth of transnational and globalizing processes affecting academic exchanges, and the increasingly international character of education, but argues that most European historians of America remain largely influenced by with the ideologies and values originating in their native cultures and preoccupied by problems and concerns, both in terms of scholarship and professional life, derived from their home institutions.

The book could perhaps devote more attention to the discussion of the work of these European historians who are based at American institutions and yet, because of their education and career paths, represent a distinctly European element there. Among the few examples that the book points to is Michał Rozbicki, whose recent work on the American revolution is presented as evidence that his

"continuous engagement with both the European world and the American academy positioned him well to think of and conduct analysis which runs counter to many expectations of his American audience" (90). Another academic community whose role could be presented at greater length is composed of these scholars who divide their working time between institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. Both groups provide a mediating and bridging influence on the practice of American history both in U.S. and in Europe.

The fact that the essays devote little space to East European academic developments can be treated not so much as an omission, but as the confirmation of the relatively slow and late development of American history in this part of Europe. The authors correctly identify the causes of this delay in the Communist past of the Eastern European countries. The imposition of Marxist ideology, totalitarian control of academic activities, and the power of censorship led to multiple constraints on the writing of American history, amplified by the official designation of the U.S. as an enemy state with an unjust social system. The consequences of these past restrictions can be still noticed twenty five years after the end of Communism, as scholars in this part of Europe are even today more likely to study political, constitutional, and migration history, than, for example, social and cultural history of America. Poland is presented as the Eastern European pioneer in the development of the historical studies of America and the significance of both the American Studies Center in Warsaw and the Polish Association for American Studies is duly acknowledged (20, 46). Characteristically, however, the authors of the book, while devoting some attention to the descriptions of the institutional developments and the growth of the distinctive areas of historical research in Eastern Europe, fail to recognize any influence of historians based in this part of the continent on the reconfigurations of the paradigms of American history in general.

Historians across Borders presents the complex contribution of European scholars to the writing of American history and identifies these national and cultural factors which concurrently both put constraints on the work of European historians and give them new original interpretive opportunities. This book can be treated as an exploration in historiography, but it also sheds light on the practice of history in Europe in general, and assesses the potential role of European scholarship in writing American history, stressing the advantages of the global and transnational approaches for which cooperation of historians across borders is an essential requirement.

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Grzegorz Kosc. *Robert Frost's Political Body*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2014. 334 pages.

Grzegorz Kosc gave us a big and original book, perhaps best described as an unusual kind of Robert Frost's cultural biography. In Kosc's work the poet's politics and poetics throw light on each other when viewed through representations of human body as the figure of public authority. In the center of the author's argument lies his perception that "[i]n Robert Frost's poetry lives the figure of an authoritative public body: a physical human body that personifies classical liberalism, the value system inherent in the socio-political situation of the poet's region, his country, and his time (1). In eight chapters preceded by a concise introduction and followed by an even more concise conclusion, the author offers meticulously researched analysis of Frost's concern with aspects of this figure showing how throughout the poet's career, "the political body" functioned as a steady point of reference for Frost's political, ethical and aesthetic reflection.

Chapter One "Frost's Experiences and the Intellectual Traditions that Influenced Him" provides relevant biographical background and points to intellectual traditions that the author considers of special importance for the poet's lifelong concern with authoritative political body, its behavior and aesthetic implications. The political body in his poetics "seems to have germinated in Frost's childhood experience" (42). Emphasizing some crucial experiences of the poet's youth, Kosc then outlines Frost's later and "wider social experience" such as "the two Red Scares, the social surveillance during both world wars, and the various embodiments of authority by different US presidents" (43). Among the intellectual traditions important for the poet are listed "John Milton's writings on the human embodiment appropriate for republican, popularly shared power," "Chesterton's critique of the Puritan illusion of full self mastery," Emerson's concept of Brahma and his interest in obelisks, and also Santayana's "vision of the dramaturgical nature of human life" (43). In conclusion the author declares that "Frost had acquired his taste for the ideal poem's form mostly by contemplating the shape of a self-regulating, Puritan body that lies at the foundation of Western-style republicanism." "However… he was simultaneously antagonized by classical artistic forms that the Maya developed to demonstrate the charisma of their kings" and, more generally, questioned "many forms of art, including Western ones, developed for the spectacles of royal power" (43).

Helpful titles of subsequent chapters indicate specific art forms and figures of "the authoritative political body" discussed in the course of the book's argument and correlated with selected works by the poet. Chapter Two "The Undoing of Maya and Frost's Chafed Boulders" focuses on the Copan stele D of the Late Classic period. Its lithograph hung in Frost's living room in Amherst and, in Kosc's words, its carvings "betrayed the Maya's collective ambition to see coherence in

all nature in the symbol of their king's body" (51). The richly detailed stele is opposed to the "Western tradition of authority…. that relies on the bodily closure and smoothness" (68) as represented in Frost's poem "Of the Stones of the Place." The poem "seems to take issue directly with the aesthetics of the Classic Maya stelae" (68) while the tenderly treated "boulders that lie /As touching as a basket full of eggs" visualize the spiritual tradition of New England. Finally, a plain, sturdy boulder becomes "The portrait of the soul of my gransir Ira. /It came from where he came from anyway" (68). Each reader must decide for her/himself how "direct" s/he finds the relationship between Frost's thinking about the form of Maya stelae and the poem's tribute to New England field boulders. The chapter is full of fascinating details concerning Frost's familiarity with and thinking about the Maya art, including the fact that his interest in it "was a part of a local fad" (77, n. 22).

Kosc has read extensively in Frost's unpublished manuscripts and correspondence, also in the related correspondence of people who knew the poet. His wide research results in inferences from such knowledge of "lessons" that the poet could have drawn for his philosophy of life and art. The book, thus, grounds particular poems in specific interests and experiences of the poet and, more broadly, in the context of the cultural climate and realities of his time. It truly contains a wealth of cultural information.

Similarly to the Maya chapter, the following chapters are structured by juxtaposition of opposing figurations of "authoritative public bodies." Thus, Chapter Three "From Shelley's Revolutionary Body to Corporeal Power in Keats" discusses the rejection by the American poet of Shelley's feminized, too open body (and sensibility) as imaged by Edward Onslow Ford's Shelley Memorial. The poet was repelled by the sculpture when, during his 1957 visit, he saw it in Oxford. Kosc identifies Frost's consequent endorsement of "the power of the carnivorous body" with "his most clear turn" to Keats in "Lines Written in Dejection on the Eve of Great Success" (1959) and sums up his discussion of the poem in the following way:

> the farmer overpowering the unruly cow with the help of his teeth is a complex allegorical figure standing for a mode of life—and ultimately a poem—that in Frost's view has a healthy approach to experience. In addition, both symbols—the tough, middlebrow head (in 'Etherealizing,' A.S.) and the cow rider—convey attitudes that Frost's poems in general propagate, promoting healthy organization of political power in a republican society. (112)

Perhaps, but believing that form carries meaning, I can't help the feeling that the anecdotal nature and the tongue-in-cheek tone of "Lines Written in Dejection on

the Eve of Great Success" work against the ambitious scope of Kosc's argument. To my ear, the highly abstract claim made by Kosc for the poem's message and the poem's grotesquely down to earth imagery pull different ways.

Observing in Chapter Four ("The Poetic Form and the Vicissitudes of the Executive Body") that "US President's bodies were often construed as indicative of their political styles or even party affiliations" (118), the author goes on to state:

> Frost believed that the presidents' bodily frames, especially as they were imaged in official portraits and cartoons, were relevant to his poetry…. To put it simply, he felt that a poem should be shaped like the body of a politician who possesses the appearance that promises the fulfillment of the nation's hopes. (120)
> ….
> In search for the best shape, Frost seemed to aim at a mean between the two extremes of bodily compactness and looseness. (122)

The chapter contains interesting cartoons (published in *Puck* around the turn of the century) to illustrate the popularity with the period's satirists of the correlation between national politics and the shape of presidential bodies. The central visual contrast for this chapter's argument is provided by the 1903 portrait of Theodore Roosevelt—"Too Rough a Rider"—by John Singer Sargent and the 1911 portrait of William Howard Taft by Anders Zorn (both in the White House). Taft's corpulent body and easy going posture represent for Kosc an approach to experience evoked in the 1936 poem "A Record Stride." Such a comfortably moderate attitude remained "a permanent correlate of Frost's imagination" (153).

The next chapter "Frost's Browneian Critique of Randolph Bourne and the Monstrosity of Left-Liberalism" continues to analyze the metaphorical significance of the shape of public bodies. Drawing on Frost's letters to Louis Untermeyer which show that at the time of his involvement with the *Seven Arts* (a magazine founded in 1916) the poet was reading works of Sir Thomas Browne[1], Kosc suggests that Browneian skepticism, especially of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*—"a book Frost would later teach and quote from"—"negatively predisposed Frost toward the epistemological ambitions of liberal arts" (166) and toward the program of *Seven Arts* in

1 The works of Sir Thomas Browne were recommended reading in nineteenth century New England. For example, Samuel Phillips Newman's *Practical System of Rhetoric*, a popular college textbook, praised Browne as "an eccentric genius" characterized by "the extravagance of his style… [and] strange and unheard of combinations." Also Thomas Wentworth Higginson stressed Browne's "vital vigor" in his "Letter to a Young Contributor" published in the April 1862 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Browne is usually mentioned among authors important for Emily Dickinson. (Capps, 66–68). Thus, as opposed to the "modern openness" of the *Seven Arts*, Frost's reading of Sir Thomas Browne grounds the poet's thinking still deeper in the conservative intellectual tradition of his region.

particular. The chapter provides ample evidence that Randolph Bourne's disfigured body was seen (not only by Frost) as a correlate of his radically liberal politics and of the too expansive aesthetics of *Seven Arts* with which Bourne (along with Van Wyck Brooks and Waldo Frank) was associated. Bourne's "anti-war essays published in the magazine scared off sponsors and alienated its general readership" (160). Hence Frost's limerick, which is the chapter's "main concern":

> In the Dawn of Creation that morning
> I remember I gave you this warning
> The Arts are but Six!
> You add Politics
> And the Seven will die a-Bourneing. (163)

The figure opposing the ugly openness of Bourne's body and his excessively tolerant sensibility is "that of Cyclopes, whose minds and faces are scrupulously closed – indeed, one eye away from being perfectly impenetrable" (184). Thus, "Frost's rejection of Polyphemus's mode of life counterbalances his fear of Bourne's" (189). The poet saw the aesthetic ideal in "the beauty of a normal human body and intuited "poems expressing the sensual scope of such bodies between those two extremes" (189–190).

The title of Chapter Six "The Inscrutability of the Body as a Principle of Frost's Irony" offers a concise formulation of its central thesis: Frost recognized the fact that the behavior of the body is ultimately not only unforeseeable but also unreadable. It may deliberately mislead, present a mask, perform a role or simulate attitudes. His recognition of the body's ultimate mystery and, consequently, of the uncertain status of any interpretation of its behavior lies, according to Kosc, at the foundation of Frost's ironic poetics. Using "Brown's Descent" as the illustrative poem, Kosc points, moreover, to the way the poem links "the illegibility of the farmer's movements to the inscrutability of writing" (224). And so, Frost's poems suspend their meanings in between different, often conflicting possibilities of interpretation while "the figure of the political body also illustrates the behavioral duplicity driving Frost's ironic poetics, points to the social use of such duplicity, and helps explain the drama of many of his poems, a drama caused by the characters' recognition of the inscrutability of others" (225).

The seventh chapter "From Absolutist Colossi to Republican Figurines" interestingly juxtaposes the "representation of the absolutist sovereign body" from the engraving on the cover of the first edition of *Leviathan* (231) and the monuments of Easter Islands with the Tanagra figurines and late nineteenth century American plaster groups by John Rogers. While *Leviathan* is "a book Thomas Hobbes wrote, significantly, to counter the advent of parliamentary republicanism" and the Easter Island monuments are "forms of group expression of collective consciousness"

(234), the Tanagra figurines and Rogers plaster groups attracted Frost as forms of democratic art "enshrining the middle class, democratic lives of their owners as ideal by aestheticizing it (sic!)" (242). In the poet's notebooks, letters, and poems the chapter traces Frost's reactions to both the monumental collectivist art of the Moai and to the Tanagra figurines and Rogers' groups, finding there evidence of the process in which the poet conceived of "a poetic style that would be equivalent to the body of popular sovereignty, the universalized body of an autonomous citizen" (241). For Frost, Kosc concludes, "democratic, abstract portraits of common people striking a balance between idealization (of others or of self) and realism seem to resolve the dilemmas he sensed in poems equivalent to colossal public monuments" (248).

Introducing his discussion of Frost's interest in "republican figurines" as a reflection and analogy of the poet's resolution "to write poems 'for all sorts and kinds,' who 'buying books in their thousands,' could…. keep his parsnip buttered" (230), Kosc claims that "he succeeded in this better than anyone else before or after him, eventually running up to the pined-for thousands." This reviewer, however, cannot but recall here Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in whom Frost did have an equally or even more successful predecessor, both in ambition and achievement. At the time of Frost's poetic apprenticeship Longfellow was still the most popular American poet. What is more, at the start of his own career the young romantic hoped to be read by thousands, planning to write and publish ballads broadside style[2]. The title of Frost's first volume *A Boy's Will* clearly indicates that embarking on his journey to fame and financial independence, its author aimed at establishing continuity between his own work and that of the old master.

The book's eighth and final chapter "The Symbol of the Political Body: Frost's Portraits in *North of Boston* and *Mountain Interval*" discusses the poet's interest in the art of portraiture declaring that "to some extent he thought of himself as a portraitist" (255). However, more importantly for the argument of the whole book, the chapter interprets the frontispiece portraits of the author—De Witt Ward's photographs of Frost's head sculpted by Aroldo du Chêne—as symbols of Frost's aesthetics: "they bring together many of the threads that run through his imagery, his characterization, and his poetic choices in general, and they are intimately connected to his art in ways that have not yet been explored" (254). The chapter proceeds to pursue those ways through examining Frost's interest in the

2 In January 1840, having completed „The Wreck of the Schooner Hesperus," Longfellow wrote to George W.Greene "I have broken ground in a new field; namely ballads…. I have a great notion of working upon the *people's* feelings. I am going to have it printed on a sheet, with a coarse picture on it. I desire a new sensation and a new set of critics" (Samuel Longfellow I: 353–354, emphasis in the original). By 1854 the poet felt financially secure enough to resign his professorship at Harvard.

art of portraiture, his understanding of writing and reading as "self-portraiture," his vision of the ideal body as rooted in Miltonic Puritan republicanism and, more specifically, connected to "the body imaging of *Comus*" (270). The rejected opposite is represented by Dante's too stern visage with its "airtight, clenched jaws" (274–275). Frost's poem which directly "identifies the beauty of the poetic form with the ideally beautiful head" (277) is "The Aim Was Song" collected in *New Hampshire* (1923) but first published around the time when Ward's photographs of Frost's bust by Du Chêne were being selected for the frontispieces. Eventually, Kosc concludes, "the features of Frost's head as it is represented by du Chêne and in turn by De Witt Ward's photographs for the frontispieces of the 1921 reprint editions of *North of Boston* and *Mountain Interval* goes (sic!) far toward explaining the poet's sensibility and his poetics" (303).

In the end then, Robert Frost's political body proves also, or rather first of all, to be an aesthetic model defining the shape and proportions of his poems. To that extent the title of the book does not fully signal the direction in which its content unfolds. The book's emphasis lies on the visual material both as evidence grounding Frost's thinking in the cultural and political concerns of his time and region and as stimulus in the process of crystallization of his conception of poetry and poetics. Kosc's argument places Frost *vis-a-vis* the modernist practice of *correspondence des arts;* for Frost correspondence did not mean synthesis. Convinced of "a general failure to grasp Frost's intentions when he invited visual artists to collaborate with him on book projects," the scholar argues that "Frost tended to regard the images in his books in their own right—not as mere illustrations, but as parallel artistic efforts in a different medium" (254). He insisted, however, on the autonomy of each art, on its staying within the bounds described by its particular medium and denounced imagism as "monstrous" in its "unbridled craving for sensory and emotional experience" (183).

Reading Kosc's demonstrations of the poet's systematic transference of the model shape of human body onto the spheres of politics, ethics, and poetics, I can't help thinking that, in his interpretation, the well balanced human body functions for Frost similarly to the way the shape of leaf functions for Thoreau in the final chapter of *Walden*: "The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf" (203). The comparison may be instructive: for Thoreau the flowing leaf/lobe form organized the whole natural world with the human body emphatically within it. For Frost the well shaped physical human body becomes the model structure of human relations and activities, personal, social and artistic. The human body is not really seen as part of the natural universe but as the dominant power/aesthetic model for most aspects of human experience. Eventually then, Kosc's argument confirms the thesis that Frost is not a poet of nature. The study presents him, emphatically, as a poet of the classically balanced human order battling against

both chaos and excessive rigor. The book's weakness may be the imbalance I find between the wealth of detailed cultural and personal material and the actual readings of poems which at times do not seem quite convincing (as, for instance, in the case of "Stones of the Place" or "Lines Written in Dejection on the Eve of Great Success"). On the other hand, the impressive abundance of cultural facts, information and materials drawn from unpublished notebooks, lectures and manuscripts make Kosc's book not only interesting but truly original. Moreover, the extensive bibliography section in itself provides a valuable resource. Still, while the filter of "the political body" opens an unexplored perspective on Frost's poetry, the foregrounding of its classically balanced aesthetics shuts off its tragic dimension.

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Joseph Kuhn. *Allen Tate: A Study of Southern Modernism and the Religious Imagination*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009. 524 pages.

Joseph Kuhn's book *Allen Tate: A Study of Southern Modernism and the Religious Imagination* is hefty and complex, and yet it is surprisingly readable and its reading highly rewarding. It offers a comprehensive anatomy—a "thick description" of sorts—of the imagination of Allen Tate (1899–1979), the most important figure of the traditionalist strain of American modernist poetry and a leading exponent of the Fugitive movement. True, Kuhn's main claim may raise no eyebrows—he asserts merely that Tate's entire work pivots on "a model of order," spiritual, moral, religious, semiotic, and aesthetic. That said, Kuhn's erudition and masterful knowledge of the subject matter, combined ingratiating critical style, make his book quite unique.

The above-mentioned model of order is rarely visible; it usually is only implicit in his poems and essays, charging most of their elements. Kuhn shows, for instance, that the religious, an important element of Tate's sense of lost order, is nothing but the "rumor" in the poems while the poet himself did not shy away from proclaiming himself an atheist, or at least he could not but surrender to what he called "our unbelieving belief." The poet couldn't do without the category completely for he felt it was potentially capable of better epistemology and conducive to perceiving the present experience in terms of myth. Paradoxically, Tate seemed to suggest even that writers find most favorable conditions in cultures moving away from those modes of thought and therefore making everyone miss those modes.

At the same time, Tate's "model of order" is shown to have been in the constant process of perfection—both intellectual and spiritual. A pure concept, it was being carefully separated from all of its accouterments. "The unity of being" was only an abstract ideal of his endless search. The Old South, for instance, is but a metaphor of spiritual community abstracted from the actual Old South and reminiscent of the religious experience of medieval Europe at its best, that is, as it might have become had it come to a full fruition. Over the years agrarianism for Tate became increasingly Southernless, universally Christian, profoundly conceptualized and abstract.

The sources of the poet's imagination are various. Sometimes they are predictable and to be expected—Virgil's mythology of the origins of the Roman *ecumene* and stemming from that the mind of Europe, especially in Eric Voegelin's account; Dante as the poet of the medieval world, of the comprehensive nature of sin, and of the symbolic imagination. At other times, those sources seem eccentric, paradoxical, and counterintuitive: one is repeatedly surprised to be made realize that Tate's traditionalism is shot through with modernist thought—for instance, with Oswald Spengler's ideas of the spiritual unity permeating each age and the unity's unavoidable decline; with A. N. Whitehead's notion of "prehensive unity" binding the object with its moment in time; finally, with Bergson's Long-View time sense. At still other times, Tate's inspirations seem—for a Southern Agrarian—somewhat impious: here I mean his evident borrowing, for his "imperative of reference," of the construction of the Medievalist imagination by the late Brahmins such Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Herbert Moore, and—most importantly—Henry Adams (his great indebtedness to T. S. Eliot is less surprising though).

Kuhn's unforced familiarity with the whole wide terrain of the Fugitive's intellectual history is daunting. Every ingredient of Tate's mind is traced, relentlessly, or with affection, to its multiple sources; the critic outlines each sentiment's history and the dynamics of its evolution in the poet's lifetime. His examples are fresh; he draws them from apparently remote quarters with astonishing ease and often with great taste. For instance, he evokes the capacities of the mind and the

power of perception of the Confederate general Stonewall Jackson (1824–1863) to explain the depth and comprehensiveness of Frank Kermode's "Romantic image" (23). The suggestion is memorable: envisioning the dynamics of the First Battle of Bull Run is analogous to envisioning a modernist symbol.

As the author shows, Tate, to illustrate the modern world wheezing under rampant dissociation of sensibility, began to rely on Edgar Allan Poe's "neo-Gothic," for it was Poe who was the first to be "principally concerned with the fantastic forms of materiality," "matterless matter," generated by the mind dislocated after the ages of the domination of Cartesian pure intellect (191). If Poe's aesthetics represented, in Tate's view, largely far-gone symptoms of the present malady, Tate liked to think he had a clear vision of the roots of that malady. Poe came to embody, frightfully, the dark tradition of "angelic"—overly intellectual and arid—imagination that began with the disowning of the senses by Abelard and then by Descartes; it was only later that Tate began to see Poe not only as symptomatic but also as having, at his best, some sense of the lost Aristotelian-Thomistic mind. Therefore Tate began to draw from Poe's imagery and symbolics.

Kuhn shows that ultimately Tate's work and imagination were predicated on a certain type of linguistic neo-medieval realism, originating from Thomistic realism, as described by Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, opposing various strains of neo-Abelardian nominalisms which, in Tate's days, assumed new forms in the thought of Charles Morris, John Dewey, and, indirectly, in the criticism of I. A. Richards. In "The Man of Letters in the Modern World" (1952), Tate shows himself to believe—as apparently Richard Weaver (*Ideas Have Consequences*, 1947) and Walker Percy (e.g., *Lost in the Cosmos*, 1983) believed—in language as both "a bridge to an intelligible reality and as a medium of consubstantiality with others" (439). Every word reconnects the individual to the order of things, to the existing classes of things, but also reunites him with the community of others.

Kuhn's interpretations of poems are usually subordinate to the goal of explaining the origins and the structure of Tate's imagination. Given those limited objectives, however, his occasional readings are persuasive and useful. One finds occasional errors, wishing Kuhn had taken more time, or maybe had been given more help, to edit the volume. Also, cutting the book would have helped too—especially in places where it seems a bit repetitive or where it unwinds too much into a Chinese-box structure (as it does in the Poe chapter or in the final section on the post-Tateians). All in all, however, the book is well written—usually deftly and energetically—and for the most part it is lucid. For all the book's complexity and astonishing richness, I didn't find it excessive; it provides nothing less than what is called for by its ambitious objectives.

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Simone Knewitz. *Modernist Authenticities: The Material Body and the Poetics of Amy Lowell and William Carlos Williams*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter Heidelberg, 2014. 249 pages.

In the conclusion of her 2014 monograph, *Modernist Authenticities: The Material Body and the Poetics of Amy Lowell and William Carlos Williams*, Simone Knewitz points out "the intense preoccupation with the body in modern culture" (220) as well as a need for "the recognition of the pivotal role of the body in the modernist period" (215). The former inevitably translates into an increasing number of studies—in both article and book form—devoted to the corporeal itself or to the corporeal dimension of a particular scholarly problem or phenomenon; the latter justifies Knewitz's efforts which culminate in *Modernist Authenticities*, a book inscribing itself in what may arguably be seen as a major academic trend.

However, contrary to what its title suggests, the scope of Knewitz's study is not limited to either Lowell's or Williams's poetic *œuvre*. While focusing primarily on the two poets whose names appear in the subtitle of her monograph, the German scholar occasionally devotes her attention to other representatives of poetic modernism, namely Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Hilda Doolittle and Jean Toomer. Nor does she take the subject of her monograph literally: Knewitz is interested not so much in actual representations of corporeality, the poetic iconography of the body or bodily imagery *per se* as in the formal and theoretical implications the body has for Lowell's and Williams's work. As the monographer herself observes,

> In the poetry and poetics of Williams and Lowell, the body is called up in two ways. First, both Williams and Lowell locate creativity in the material body, building their creative theories on somatic metaphors. Second, and more significantly, both authors turn to the body as a locus of performance, associating it with material presence. What perhaps connects Lowell and Williams the most is the theatricality of their poetry and the attention they give to surfaces. (220)

If one had to list the key words for Knewitz's study, "materiality," "authenticity," "performance" and "presence" would probably be the right choice.

The subtitle of *Modernist Authenticities* contains the phrase "the material body." Accordingly, the first of the five chapters which make up the monograph is devoted to materiality—rather than corporeality—as Knewitz looks at the poetic use Lowell and Williams, as well as a couple of other modernist poets, make of flower tropes. Taking the nineteenth century as her point of departure, Knewitz opposes modernism to the Romantic and Victorian traditions, showing how American modernists remake and reinterpret time-honored flower tropes, "by asserting the material [rather than transcendent] dimension of flowers and by

simultaneously emphasizing the materiality of the medium of language" (74) as well as underscoring the performative aspect of poetry. The points made by Knewitz in her first chapter set the tone for her overall reflections on modernist poetry as exemplified by Lowell and Williams: a poetry to which materiality, aligned with authenticity, self-referentiality and performativity are central. She also stresses the transition from poetry as representation to poetry as presentation, made by Williams, and shows how the queer dimension of Lowell's *œuvre* manifests itself in her flower poems.

In an effort to explain "why the modernists referred to the body as locus of authenticity as well as anxiety" (78), Knewitz chooses to examine Williams's and Lowell's poetry in terms of the ideas of François Delsarte, promulgated by the expressive culture movement, whose emergence in America coincided with that of modernism. The monograph's second chapter is devoted to the parallels between the movement in question and the formally innovative aspects of modernist poetry. It also reveals a preoccupation which recurs throughout Knewitz's study: that with "the relationship between body and text" (79). Lowell's correspondence with Samuel Silas Curry, a specialist in oratory associated with expressive culture, prompts the scholar to look at the American poet's work in the light of the latter's belief that poetry is to be spoken, not merely read silently, and that its dramatic dimension, inextricably linked with body language, is not to be ignored. Unconcerned with the oral aspect of verse, Williams is nevertheless concerned with the idea of "poetry as self-expression" (102). Knewitz distinguishes between Lowell's "turn[ing] her poems into dramatic performances" (110) and Williams's being "dramas of the mind" (110). The search for (self-)presence and authenticity is important to both poets, as is performativity as a means of attaining—or trying to attain—them, but they are also aware of this search being problematic and ambivalent. Knewitz also points to the theatricality inherent in both Lowell's and Williams's poetry.

Seeing immediacy as integral to Williams's *œuvre*, the monographer uses her third chapter to explore his volume *Kora in Hell*, with particular emphasis on its author's use of literary improvisation, which is, in the German scholar's opinion, Williams's "[largely unsuccessful] attempt to circumvent convention in order to relate somatically to the world, to 'write the body'" (132). Central to the chapter is *Borderline*, Kenneth Macpherson's 1930 experimental film featuring Hilda Doolittle, which Knewitz sets against *Kora in Hell* on the one hand and "Spring Day," an example of Lowell's polyphonic prose, on the other. The fact that *Borderline* is a silent film makes the role the body and body language play in it particularly prominent. An "attempt to create a cinematic language of the body" (120) or, in other words, "to 'write the body' in film," Macpherson's work is interesting in terms of the body imagery it contains, as well as the way it tackles the notions of authenticity and immediacy, inextricably linked with the corporeal. It is

therefore no wonder then that the third chapter discusses the somatic imagery in *Borderline* in detail.

Aware of "the influence of the new recording technologies on modernism" (221), the author of the monograph has film and photography, so to speak, at the back of her mind when discussing the corporeal and material dimensions of Lowell's and Williams's poetics. The fact that Eadweard Muybridge's photo depicting a female body in various stages of motion is reproduced on the cover of the book is more than fitting. In the first chapter, a discussion of poetic flower tropes is paralleled by that of early-twentieth-century photographs of plants. In the third chapter, the new media are represented by Macpherson's film. Both chapters are illustrated with reproductions of photographs and film stills respectively, which, of course, helps the reader visualize the points made in the study. The photographs reproduced in the fourth chapter, which focuses on bodily deviance, are those taken from a late-nineteenth-century work dealing with anatomical and physiological anomalies or what was considered anomalous at the time. The visual, as Knewitz understands, is allied to the bodily, and "the centrality of vision and visuality" (171) she detects in Williams's poetry is applicable to her monograph as well. The visual and the medical come together in the poetry and prose of Williams, the doctor-poet, and, in the monograph's penultimate chapter, the scholar explores voyeurism, which she sees as "self-reflective" (164–166), and the role of the observer as well as the treatment of femininity and the female body in his work, to which "the very power of the male gaze" (151) is important. Knewitz's interest in how Otherness and the Other(s) are represented—or perhaps presented—in modernist American poetry continues into the book's last chapter, devoted exclusively to Amy Lowell's *Pictures of the Floating World*. As in Williams's *œuvre*, the erotic—or, in Lowell's case, homoerotic—aspect is important. Knewitz examines "spectacles of deviance" (191) in Lowell's Orient-inspired poems concerned with "racial and sexual Otherness" (191), which is often treated ambivalently by the American poet, and her queer love poetry, focusing on themes connected with illicit sexuality, such as prostitution, on the one hand and homoerotic symbolism on the other.

Modernist Authenticities is not, of course, free from drawbacks. Its author makes comparatively little use of the considerable body—no pun intended—of theoretical writings concerning corporeality: the names of leading theorists such as Michel Foucault or Judith Butler, whom Knewitz is, by her own admission, "strongly indebted to" (30), appear on the Works Cited list, but the actual references to them are few and far between. Knewitz attempts to make up for this rather general treatment of body theory by referring to it in the monograph's introduction. This attempt, however, strikes the reader as rather hasty, as does the inclusion of the Harlem Renaissance and of references to cultural theory in

the coda. Though the author's decision to apply the conclusions of her research on Lowell and Williams to Jean Toomer and other Afro-American modernists is not unfounded or uninteresting, especially in the light of the book's overall preoccupation with race and Otherness, the coda seems to be an unlikely place to start a discussion of what, despite Knewitz's arguments, is another chapter in the history of American modernist poetry. On the other hand, the fact that *Modernist Authenticities* is a coherently structured book, whose author is careful to make connections between her arguments as well as between the different chapters and subchapters of her study, may, paradoxically, be problematic; simply put, Knewitz's conclusions are already included in the body—again no pun intended—of the monograph, which enables—but also, in a way, forces—her to make the coda open-ended, suggestive of ideas for further research rather than a recapitulation of the research of which the book is the fruit. It must also remembered that, inevitably, there is always something left unsaid in a monograph dealing with a poet—or poets—or *any* monograph for that matter; therefore, it is sometimes better to focus on the subject proper rather than begin exploring a new author: a case in point is Knewitz's discussion of Lowell's polyphonic prose, which is at times slightly undeveloped and inconclusive. There are also a few details I would disagree with: for example, I would challenge the view that Pound's best-known Imagist, haiku-like poem makes use of conventional metaphor, which—if I understand her correctly—is what the monographer seems to suggest. On a purely linguistic level, the monograph leaves little to be desired, though it would be worth eliminating the occasional lexical and grammatical mistakes (eg, *performance art* versus *the performing arts*, *to stand in for* versus *to stand for*) in subsequent editions. On a practical level, an index of names and perhaps titles would be desirable.

Far from being a monograph focusing on the body itself, Simone Knewitz's study also considers the notions of gender, sexuality and race, and takes into account both poetic content and form. Nor are Knewitz's interests limited to poetry or even literature, as considerable attention is given to the visual arts: film and photography. The main arguments of this elegantly written book are for the most part clear and easy to follow, but not simplistic. The points made by Knewitz are supported by numerous instances of close reading, and her poem analyses are both extensive and convincing. Additionally, the necessary background is always traced, though the reader is not overburdened with irrelevant information. While the fact that Knewitz refers to American modernist poets other than Lowell and Williams may be seen as slightly distracting, it has the advantage of creating a modernist continuum and thus of contextualizing the two poets central to the study. In this way, the monographer avoids scholarly solipsism; moreover, she demonstrates that her general knowledge of American modernist poetry is solid. On balance, *Modernist Authenticities* is a well-written, well-documented and infor-

mative book which gives us several interesting insights into American modernist poetry.

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Conseula Francis. *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin, 1963–2010*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2014. 174 pages.

In her most recent book, Conseula Francis examines five decades of scholarship devoted to the person and creative output of James Baldwin. She analyzes the trajectory of Baldwin's critical reception and rigorously positions the debates revolving his writings in their historical contexts. Due to the complexity of Baldwin's *oeuvre*—which spans fiction, essays, plays, poetry and a photo-book, and engages with the most pivotal issues in postwar American culture—Francis's project becomes a microhistory of trends in literary theory and criticism since the 1960s, scrupulously registering the emergence of black, gender, and queer studies.

The first part of the study divides the corpus of selected scholarship into three periods. The first decade, 1963–1973, witnessed the publication of the most canonical of Baldwin's texts as well as the peak of his public presence and political activism. Francis points out how the critical debates, at the time closely linked to the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power discourse, negotiate between the politics of reconciliation offered in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and the more radical politics of *The Fire Next Time*. Many critics analyze the problematic Wright-Baldwin relationship and the issue of racial representation and authenticity. The most radical voices of the time find Baldwin's approach too subtle and ambivalent, which is most poignantly illustrated in the infamous homophobic attack launched by Eldridge Cleaver in *Soul on Ice*. The second chapter scrutinizes the years 1974–1987 and a dramatic reversal of the previous trends and interests. Baldwin's public popularity wanes, which is reflected in the diminishing number of texts devoted to his writing. Yet in contrast to the 1960s, when the relationship between personal, public, and literary realms was at the center, subsequent critics tend to give formalist and poststructuralist readings of his texts, which position *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Another Country* and *Giovanni's Rooms* in the canon of American literature as texts of universal significance. The years following Baldwin's death in 1988 offer a significant rereading of his writings, which stems from the growing dominance of gender theory and cultural criticism, whose attention to intersectional identities and interdisciplinary research make Baldwin a

particularly appealing writer. The true game-changer, however, is the emergence of queer studies, which put his works in the spotlight and substitute *Go Tell It on the Mountain* with *Giovanni's Room* as the Baldwin classic. Throughout her examination of critical history, Francis refers to contemporary public debates. Such a historicized juxtaposition shows how profoundly our academic readings are shaped by contemporary trends and available tools, which change the points of emphasis in the analyzed texts and reshape the canon.

In the second part of the book, Francis offers two analyses that meaningfully supplement the survey of in the first part. She analyzes here popular reviews of Baldwin's texts and shows how they have shaped the scholarly debate. Another chapter discusses critical studies of his most often anthologized short-story—"Sonny's Blues." Such zooming in on one text interestingly complements the general overview in the first part, but more importantly Francis pinpoints the reasons for the text's immense popularity. "Sonny's Blues," all critics seem to agree, is a well-crafted, self-contained text. Its craftsmanship invites close readings, whereas its ambiguity enables an array of, often conflicting, interpretations. It is, however, its avoidance of radical politics and explicit sexuality that are decisive and make it neatly fit into the canon.

The last chapter introduces the most recent voices in the burgeoning field of Baldwin scholarship. At the onset of the twenty-first century, he continues to be at the center of black and ethnic studies, gender and queer studies, as well as cultural and American studies. Francis claims that so many critics find him invaluable since both in his fiction and non-fiction, he remains "a model of critical engagement with the world around us" (139). In turn, due to the complexity of Baldwin studies and Francis's conscientious analysis, scholars of many academic disciplines will find *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin 1963–2010* useful and engaging.

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Jean-Jacques Malo, ed. *The Last Time I Dreamed About the War: Essays on the Life and Writings of W.D. Ehrhart*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2014. 284 pages.

> This book is not about heroes. English poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds, or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion, or power, except War.

> Above all I am not concerned with Poetry.
> My subject is War, and the pity of War.
> The Poetry is in the pity.
> Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. *All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.* (Owen 31; emphasis added)

Although these words were penned in 1918 by Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), one of the most renowned soldier poets of the Western Front, they could also preface any volume of poems by William Daniel Ehrhart who devoted his post-soldier life to educating Americans about the truth of the Vietnam War. He went to Vietnam, "imagining that he might become the Wilfred Owen of the Great War" (*Last Time* 142), but the years of service in the Marines, including thirteen months in Vietnam, "the madness of it all," led him to find his own voice, his own words which, once articulated, have earned him the status of the Dean of Vietnam War poetry, and one of its Poets Laureate.

Author of "some of the finest poetry to emerge from the Vietnam War" (Hillstrom and Collier Hillstrom 269), so far he has written nine books (among them *A Generation of Peace*, 1975; *To Those Who have Gone Home Tired*, 1984; *Just For Laughs,* 1990; *The Outer Banks…*, 1984; *Beautiful Wreckage,* 1999*; From the Bark of the Daphne Tree*, 2013) and ten chapbooks of poetry (published between 1975–2013), and compiled, edited and co-edited several highly regarded anthologies of veteran verse (*Demilitarized Zones,* 1976*; Unaccustomed Mercy,*1989*; Carrying the Darkness,* 1989), also on the Korean War (*Retrieving Bones,*1999). The prose books he has produced over the years contain a trilogy of polemical, critically acclaimed memoirs (*Vietnam–Perkasie*, 1983; *Marking Time*, 1986; and *Busted*, 1995), and many essays collected in *In the Shadow of Vietnam* (1991), *The Madness of It All* (2002), and *Dead on the High Hill* from 2012. To this impressive list Donald Anderson adds *Ordinary Lives* (1999), a searingly honest (Wilson) account of the experiences of the volunteers from Platoon 1005 and the paths their lives have taken since Parris Island and Vietnam (Isaacs).

Similar to other veterans of the Vietnam War, the most notable being Jusef Kommunyakaa, John Balaban, Jan Barry, Bruce Weigl etc., Ehrhart's themes address such issues as

> the horrors of war, the deaths of innocent civilians, the tragic ending of youthful lives, and the general sundering of moral and ethical values. Reflecting the consciousness of the 1960s and 1970s, however, [many poems] mirror the feelings of all participants as America's longest war began to seem more and more unwinnable: the sense of loss of individuality, the feeling of guilt at having

> participated, the impossibility of anyone's understanding the totality of the experience, the realization of having been betrayed by higher authority, and most often, the anger and bitterness at feeling like… not a cog in a mighty machine but merely 'a slab of meat on the table.' (Pratt)

No wonder Ehrhart took it upon himself to assume the position of a contemporary witness and unlie Vietnam "the single most important experience of [his soldier poet's] life" (Pratt)—the core of darkness he still carries within, yet one which inspired many of his best poems. In *Worlds of Hurt* Kali Tal states that "education became one of Ehrhart's passions, a duty to a younger generation. 'If our children,' [she quotes him,] 'are to help us build the kind of world they deserve, they must know what kind of world they live in, and how we got where we are. All of us must be teachers. It is not an option. It is an obligation'" (Tal).

Comparing the poet's task to that of the "farmer of dreams" from his poem ("Farmer"), Ehrhart allegorizes his efforts as an anti-war activist: he, too, "labors to relieve" and knows "what it means to be patient." Hence, having sown his field of words, he goes out to see "what is growing and what remains to be done" (*Last Time* 48). Like students in Mr. Ehrhart's class ("The Teacher"), readers learn how important they are for the poet's success and what feedback they can expect: "I need your hands to steady me," he writes, "I need your hearts to give me courage / I need you to walk with me / Until I find a voice / That speaks the language that you speak" (198). A poet whose profession is peace (156), he is always "on patrol" ("A Relative Thing"), a soldier "harnessed with our terrible knowledge," and haunted by questions with which he has to live. Questions which are also applicable today in the context of the increased militarism that defines the world, American culture and character. Questions whose study reveals a grim prophecy of an impending catastrophe, of another war which he sees "coming / one more time" ("A Warning to My Students").

*

Coming out at a time when people still really need to relearn the lessons taught by anti-war poets, *The Last Time I Dreamed About the War* (2014), edited by J. J. Malo, is a significant book of essays devoted to one of the major contributors to American literature of the Vietnam War. Scholarly and comprehensive in scope, they are, at the same time, accessible elucidations which altogether pay tribute to W.D. Ehrhart, his life, his peace-making efforts and, above all, his writings. The volume takes its title from Ehrhart's poem which retells the story of his being healed by a woman who had the courage to stay with him through the worst.

She wanted to run, she told me later,
but she didn't. She married me instead.
Don't ask me why. I only know
you never know what's going to save you
and I've never dreamed again about the war. (*Last Time* 266)

Ten years after Vietnam, he was "saved" because somebody gave him the chance to open up and unbottle long-suppressed nightmares. He could thus declare an end to the war and its horrors, grateful for the patience and kind understanding, which he can but wish and hope for in his readers.

A long overdue retrospect, *The Last Time I Dreamed About the War* contains an array of original and engaging essays written by twenty authors who, characterized by different degrees of involvement with Ehrhart, diverse backgrounds, nationalities, attitudes to/ involvement in the Vietnam experience, as well as professional and literary interests, all combine to offer a varied, pluralist and truly international (USA, Japan, India, France, England, Austria, the Netherlands) perspective on W.D. Ehrhart. Neatly organized, the volume falls into four thematic sections, each of which of elaborates on one specific aspect of the contributors' assessment of Ehrhart: his prose writings (I), his poetry (II), his influence on other writers (III) and his presence in the classroom (IV).

Part I concentrates on Ehrhart as the author of essays and memoirs. The discussion of their merits naturally corresponds with an analysis of the writer's goals, as well as the impact of his intellectual honesty on Ehrhart's status as a writer, still functioning only "outside the widely accepted discursive frames." Whereas Donald Anderson ("Darkness Carried: W.D. Ehrhart's Memoirs and Essays") offers a fresh and insightful reading of Ehrhart's memoir trilogy, and Subarno Chattarji ("The Chameleon War: *Passing Time* and the Remembrance of the Vietnam War") narrows down his focus on memoirs to *Passing Time*, David A. Willson ("W.D. Ehrhart, Essayist: Musings of a Librarian and Friend") scrutinizes Ehrhart's trilogy of essays (1991–2012). Willson's "multiple perspective combin[ing] the experience and expertise of reference librarian, Vietnam veteran and bibliographer" (3) shows itself, among others, through his meticulous study of book covers, photographs, illustrations, acknowledgements as well as indexes.

Praising Ehrhart as a diligent scholar and researcher, the essayists themselves support their views with the opinion of such leading critics of the Vietnam canon as P. Beidler, V. Gotera, D. Ringnalda, K. Tal or J.C. Pratt. Extensive quotations from Ehrhart's essays and memoirs enable the reader to appreciate his experiential and intellectual honesty, and they shed light on the variety of important issues he tackles: the chameleon-like / transformational potential of the war, the

victimization of the veterans, the complex interplay between history and memory, nostalgia and patriotism. They also try to fathom why Ehrhart's superb non-fiction has found neither the larger audience nor the critical response it so clearly deserves (18).

Part II embraces a bulk of eight essays which, one way or another, enhance various aspects of Ehrhart's poetic achievement. Here, too, the contributors concern themselves with the evolution from patriot to peacenik, examining the artistic aspects of his war poetry and its moral responsibility, and the memorialization of the war. His early works, dealt with by Ammiel Alcalay (**"**Relieving the National Debt: W.D. Ehrhart and the Wages of Memory), reveal some interpretational avenues to be further explored by other contributors. They include a price of memory, the role of the imagination in the perception of anti-war poetry, and its therapeutic function which, allowing the artist to perfect his art of resistance, at the same time aims to "reopen lines of recognition to oneself, and then to form the basis of resistance rooted in the integrity of one's experience" (LD 56). Adam Gilbert (**"**'We are the ones you sent': Moral Responsibility and War in the Poetry of W.D. Ehrhart") concerns himself with the theme of moral responsibilities in Ehrhart's poetry, not infrequently depicting soldiers involved in the many conflict zones the world over (Cambodia, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Granada, El Salvador, Kuwait, Pakistan etc.). Especially stressed is the motif of America's guilt and its evasion of complicity and, resulting from Ehrhart's awareness of this, his own refusal to soothe the conscience, perpetrate indifference, or silence an injustice. Hence, many of his works feature an anti-war propagandist who either bears witness to the horrors of war, or denounces the mechanisms of deception and manipulation. But then, Erhart is true to his goal: "my poetry", he writes, "is an ongoing attempt to atone for the unethical, for my loss of a moral compass when I was a young man" (71).

Setting the selected works of J. Kommunyakaa and D. Anderson against Ehrhart's "The Wall" and "The Invasion of Grenada," Diderik Oostdijk ("W.D. Ehrhart at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial") compares the treatment of monuments in the poetry of Vietnam veterans, and reminds us that they are, in fact, merely "empty gestures" and "awful clichés," and that the granite colossi still exude "the smell of rotten dreams, covering unpleasant truths" (76).

Nicolle Gollner ("From Patriot to Poet to Peacenik") charts Ehrhart's evolution from patriot to peacenik, whose work, making Vietnam poetry a "fully fledged and accredited literary genre," legitimized the soldier-survivor's right to openly speak of his feelings. Ehrhart is perceived as a representative voice of "the tragic generation," people who, like the combatants of the Great War

> came home, home to a lie,
> home to many deceits,

home to old lies and new infamy;
usury age-old and age-thick
and liars in public places? (Pound 346)

One of those who "walked eye-deep in hell / believing in old men's lies, / then unbelieving," he feels an uncompromising urge to tell the truth, and to encourage people to stay watchful and alert (93). Gollner points to Ehrhart's clever deployment of propagandist poetics (the use of the first person speaker and his authentic, the first-hand experience, the questioning of official truths, the solid historical and psychological contextualization, and the cathartic function of poetry) and draws many parallels between the themes in his poetry and the works by the soldier poets of WWI (martyrdom in the trenches versus Christ's crucifixion, the retelling and re-experiencing of the trauma, anti-war protests, the criticism of civilians etc.).

In order to explain the reasons for Ehrhart's staying "outside the traditional heroic canon," Dale Ritterbusch ("Poetry and the Art of Resistance: the Literature of W. D. Ehrhart"), portrays W.D. Ehrhart's struggle to remain an independent voice, not softened by collected readers/editors' demands and their political correctness. He emphasizes Ehrhart's goals: to serve as provocateur and fight against a history "filled with arrogance, half-truths, obfuscations, falsehoods, deceptions and lies" (102–103). Finally, he draws attention to the unquestionable didacticism of Ehrhart's poems, which, compared to "didactic sermons", invariably point to the interconnectedness (international/universal nature) of the problems and contexts he considers.

A fresh angle of approaching war poetry via visual interpretation appears in Yoko Shirai's ("W.D. Ehrhart and Chimei Hamada: War Memories of a Poet and of a Print Artist") discussion of Ehrhart's poems which she reads through Hamada Chimei's haunting art inspired by his experience of war in China. The enclosed illustrations, a war prisoner captured in the process of taking his own life ("Elegy for a New Conscript"), and the huge, terrified eyes of children/civilians watching the war ("Unforgettable Faces"), bring forth those aspects Ehrhart the Vietnam veteran also addresses, for instance in such works as "Full moon" or "Guerilla War." Veterans, Schirai reminds us, are those who have to live with the memory that they "were inextricable accomplices / in this travesty of dreams [and that they] are not alone" (118).

One of the longer essays in the collection, N. Bradley Christie's ("The Poetry of W.D. Ehrhart: A Bibliographic Essay") looks at Ehrhart's publishing and editorial careers through his books, thus compiling the "first comprehensive, descriptive bibliography of his output" (2). In this "role of honour," each volume is mentioned, with Christie offering a detailed commentary of its representative texts, sometimes highlighted by a discussion of the changes introduced, and/ or his own opinion of them. The scrutiny of over four decades (1972–2013) of Ehrhart's writing, including his books of poetry and prose, his chapbooks (even the

samizdat ones), and anthologies (edited and co-edited) demonstrates how indeed strong his position is as a man of letters.

Part Two, somewhat disappointingly, closes with J. J. Malo's interview with Ehrhart which, in comparison with the other essays, addresses rather trivial but interesting questions. For instance, one can learn that Ehrhart always composes in longhand and that his poems hardly ever rhyme and that he dislikes the notion of therapeutic or pacifist poetry. Other aspects of the interview include his handling of writer's blocks or the influence of nature/culture upon his work. Legitimate as they are in an essay entitled "The Art of Writing Poetry," the in-depth nature of the study made me expect a much more scholarly-oriented enquiry, a more profound questioning, directed, for instance, toward Ehrhart's literary likes and dislikes, his favorite (war) poem(s), his views on other big names of Vietnam Literature, etc.

One other flaw in the collection seems to be the absence of a study dealing specifically with Ehrhart as a lyric poet, with a focus on the bulk of his work that *does not* deal with the war but with the poems about his live engagement with the world and nature, about his family and friends, his city and his journeys. Nevertheless, apart from these imperfections, Parts I and II make for very rewarding reading and are, in my opinion, the greatest asset of the collection.

The two remaining sections demonstrate Ehrhart as an influential writer, yet whereas in Part III his impact manifests itself through his relationships with such writers /editors/ fellow veterans as Jan Barry ("Ehrhart Effect"), Edward F. Palm ("The Importance of Being Earnest With One's Public and Oneself / A Veteran's Eye View of W.D. Ehrhart's Vietnam Poetry and Prose"), Robert C. Doyle ("Authentic voices.: Echoes of Bill Ehrhart and Me") and Gary Metras ("W.D.Ehrhart and Adastra Press: A Publisher's Perspective"), Part IV—through the essays of Martin Novelli ("Bill Ehrhart as Educatior"), Joseph Cox ("W.D. Ehrhart: Transformational Teacher"), Matthew K. Irwin, Charles L. Yeats ("'I have learned by now where such thoughts lead': W.D. Ehrhart's Poetry and Rethinking How We Study and Teach History") W.D. Ehrhart: Teacher-Poet") and Clint Van Winkle ("Making the Wreckage Beautiful")—testifies to Ehrhart's charisma as an educator.

Many of these contributions rely on their authors' recollections of contacts with Ehrhart and they infrequently return to, and thus illuminate, the issues already deemed important by the other essayists: Ehrhart as a vital, though hugely underrated, representative of the literature of trauma, his relentless push to publish veritable literary works probing every aspect of the war in zones of conflict other than Vietnam (156), or his superb instinct as an editor. Even more significantly, one learns that his authentic retelling of the experience, which provides a paradigm of Vietnam experience from enthusiasm to disillusionment, makes his works extremely useful in many programs helping spur participants to tackle the war demons (165). Last but not least, Ehrhart's indefatigable determination to educate people is brought

forth. Nevertheless, characterized in his many capacities as a lecturer and conference speaker, a participant of debates and poetry reading sessions, he is most frequently praised for his "electrifying presence in the classroom" (Yeats, Irwin), invaluable in stimulating students' interest and motivation to learn and remember. Thanks to this presence the essayists, many of whom are themselves teachers (Novelli, Cox, Doyle) in universities or high schools, realized the need for changes in the methodology of teaching history, emphasizing now the importance of first hand contact with witnesses, and of poetry as a legitimate source of knowledge.

The volume closes with a selection of Ehrhart's poems which, chosen by the essayists as especially representative of the issues discussed, allow the readers to have their own **tête-à-tête** with the master, and see for themselves to what extent his profession is peace and how hounded he is by history. The texts make for compelling reading. We can admire Ehrhart's renewed sense of moral clarity (Yeats) and his language and image expertise, yet it is his gift of human kindness and empathy that 'writes' his best poetry, for instance, "The Lotus Cutters of Hô Tây," about people who do not think of danger but "[g]ather morning" into their small boats. "Who would come… to bomb them? what have they done but keep the sun from falling?" (261).

Equipped with an appendix of Ehrhart's military history, a bibliography of his works and a list of critical elucidations about him, not to mention an index, designed to help the reader find information quickly and easily, Malo's collection of essays seems to be an excellent introduction for students and scholars alike who would like to go deeper into the subject of Vietnam War literature. All in all, *The Last Time I Dreamed About the War* extends and develops the key themes of his works and more than confirms his reputation as a major Vietnam War poet. The book deserves praise for its structural cohesion and dedication to the cause and, most importantly, for its well-argued and well-researched points. Let us hope that this holistic approach, capable of attracting the attention of a wide range of readers, can finally let Ehrhart win their hearts and minds.

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Alan Gibbs. *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. 296 pages.

Alan Gibb's discussion of recent American trauma narratives contests the widespread notions of trauma and its specific model of PTSD, as represented in the trauma theory initiated by Cathy Caruth, as well as its aesthetic encodings in diverse literary works published in the USA in the early twenty-first century. The author develops the already existing critique of PTSD to study and challenge the well-established and sometimes uncritically replicated ideas about trauma, showing, through analysis of carefully selected trauma texts, how limiting the rigid formula of traumatic experience has become, and how the best literary representations of trauma have broadened and problematized the notion itself and the aesthetic means at the writer's disposal.

In his book, Gibbs first of all takes to task several ideas about the mechanism of traumatic experience included in the highly influential interpretation of Freud in the work of Cathy Caruth, notably her *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* of 1995, and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* of 1996. The first of Freud's notions underscored by Caruth which he finds problematic is the idea of *Nachtraglichkeit* [belatedness], described by Freud as the more or less deliberate and conscious obliteration of the traumatic event from memory, which Caruth in her dissociative model interprets as involuntary and unconscious. As it has been recently argued, the traumatic event may not so much be forgotten or repressed,

as rather left unrecorded in memory. Moreover, the disruption of memory in the experience of trauma may in fact be common to all other types of memory and not unique to trauma only, thus making the notion of belatedness irrelevant in trauma studies.

However, the major disagreement with Caruth foregrounded by Gibbs in his introduction concerns the fact that trauma functions in much more complex ways than Caruth's dissociative model allows. After critics such as Ann E. Kaplan and Susannah Radstone, Gibbs underlines the constant presence of trauma in the patient's memory where it is reworked and affected by fantasies: "it is not an event, which is by its nature 'toxic' to the mind, but what the mind later does to memory" (Radstone, "Trauma Theory," 17; Gibbs, 13). As Gibbs argues, traumatic memory inflects the mind and remains active, sometimes leading to fantasy identifications with the perpetrator.

Another significant concept concerning traumatized memory that Gibbs questions is the literal quality of recollection in the form of flashbacks and nightmares that trauma sufferers experience. Again, the author calls the idea simplistic and unfounded, yet remarkable for its far-going consequences in cultural and literary criticism. The allegedly literal character of traumatic memory has led some critics and artists to the conviction that trauma is unrepresentable in art and literature, or, if at all, only through radical narrative fragmentation and experimentation. Equally controversial for Gibbs, among others, remains a punctual model of trauma in which the traumatic event is described as occurring suddenly and having a devastating and overwhelming impact on the sufferer's mind. To counter this concept Gibbs points to representations of trauma in postcolonial narratives in which trauma has as a rule a protracted, insidious character.

Gibbs's two significant contributions to PTSD and trauma theory are his polemical problematizations of the perpetrator trauma and the idea of so-called collective trauma. Both of these began to be studied more closely after 9/11, though PTSD as a phenomenon originated as early as the Vietnam experience. Gibbs points out to the difficulty with perceiving and describing perpetrator trauma due to the fact that cultural trauma studies have their roots not only in Freud but also in Holocaust studies where objections to examining the trauma of the perpetrator might have a strong ethical foundation. On the other hand, he denounces the notion of collective trauma as a dangerous ideological construct leading to justifications of highly dubious political and military decisions and literal persecutions of minorities.

One of Gibbs's preoccupations in his book is offering an overview of American trauma narratives belonging to what he calls the trauma genre, a subcategory of which being defined as trauma metafiction, characterized by a parodic treatment of trauma and based on the already well-established postmodern metafictional devices.

In spite of the daring and novelty of Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, representative of successful postmodern experimentation within the trauma genre, Gibbs claims that in some authors similar innovations in fact concealed their indebtedness to the well-established body of existing trauma literature (33), only contributing to the production of rigid and formulaic representations of trauma within the further limited, blindly emulated and highly conventionalized trauma genre. Fortunately, the author also comes up with a study of alternative trauma writings, among which he includes more realistic representations of trauma, and claiming that it is precisely this convention, labeled here as neo-realism or neo-naturalism, that ensures a less formulaic and less pseudo-experimental mode of trauma narrative.

In chapter one, Gibbs provides an analysis of twentieth-century trauma fiction on the example of selected writings by J.D. Salinger, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, E.L. Doctorow, Tim O'Brien, and Toni Morrison. He concentrates on three generations of writers dealing with historical and contemporary trauma experience, first using experimental form to create an effect of shock and at the same time convey political critique, then trying to reinvigorate the already blunted impact of postmodern avantgarde experimentation through a recourse to more conventionally realistic techniques. What is especially important in Gibbs's study, here and further on, is his steadfast attention paid to the powerful and negative influence of misdirected literary criticism on the quality of the trauma genre: he quotes the example of the blunting effect of trauma representations in historiographic metafiction, due to its being named and defined by Linda Hutcheon, by this turning them into a "more readily imitable typology." Criticism dealing with trauma narratives in the late twentieth century greatly contributed to the glib acceptance of the formulaic concepts suggested by PTSD and Carruthian theoretical models, turning them into a "monolithic explanatory code" through which both writers and critics embraced the desired characteristics of paradigmatic narratives.

The comprehensive analysis of Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) in chapter two goes counter the usual reading of the novel as a *tour de force* of postmodern experimentation, amounting to a vision of reality as text. Gibbs, however, observes in the texture of Danielewski's work the activity of what he calls the inscribed narrator and his inscribed narration, which he reads as a trauma narrative whose completion has failed. The story of Johnny Truant's internal wound originating in his childhood, and the labyrinthine construction of the novel only confirm the suitability of postmodern metafiction for narrating trauma, instead of simply forming a pseudo-experimental act to support the principles of a theory. What becomes a specially subtle tool for highlighting the novel's successful experimentation is a latently parodic treatment of some of Johnny's experience, which problematizes a fixed formula of trauma in contemporary culture. In fact, Johnny as an unreliable narrator-writer-editor probes into "the very project of

postmodernism—its challenge to the foundations of Enlightenment thought and its dismantling of ontological certainty… and its consequences are found to be fundamentally traumatic" (114).

Chapter three of the book, devoted to responses to 9/11 and analyzing in detail Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), examines the effectiveness of selected postmodern techniques in rendering the experience of trauma. While Foer is accused of relying on the worn-out devices of the postmodern avantgarde, Spiegelman in his comic strip form manages to convince the reader of the reality of the unbearable, though the trauma he depicts concerns not so much the attack on the Towers as rather its social and political effects. A special issue in this context becomes the notion of collective trauma which is questioned by Spiegelmann, and directly rejected by Gibbs as an ideological fraud. The critically political and public preoccupations in Spiegelman's comic strip representation of 9/11 stand in stark contrast to Foer's traditional by now focus on the private inner torment of the traumatized subject, which effectively eliminates the historicized contextualization of the cause of the trauma and diverts the reader's attention from its dire political consequences. It is Spiegelman within his novel formal frames who exposes a recourse to racist stereotypes, retreat into nationalistic obsessions, and "the widespread xenophobic paranoia" observable in New York after the attack, moving from the author's personal case of Holocaust postmemory to the terrifying effects of the traumatic experience at hand.

In the following passages of Gibbs's argumentation, we are invited to observe how the Gulf War memoirs tend to deny the American armed forces agency, aggression and responsibility for violence, and redirect them onto the other. Gibbs's discussion covers a representative number of the Gulf War narratives in which American soldiers are described as suffering from "a complex matrix of trauma" caused by their status of both victims and perpetrators: Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*, Joel Turnipseed's *Baghdad Express* (both from 2003), Evan Wright's *Generation Kill* (2004), Nathaniel Fick's *One Bullet Away* (2005), Kayla Williams's *Love My Rifle More Than You* (2006) and a selection of short works collected in the anthology *Powder: Writing by Women in the Ranks* (2008). Experiences of seeing decomposing or burning corpses, murder or suicide, facing incidents of death caused by a booby trap in the post-war clean-up, or the panic of suddenly coming under enemy or friendly fire have been rendered in these narratives through reportage-like depictions of post-traumatic behavior, mostly reconfirming the generic conventions of war literature. In the chapter, Gibbs questions Dominick LaCapra's insistence that the readers should invariably feel "empathy with the victim and repulsion toward the perpetrator." (LaCapra 133, Gibbs 167), and by claiming that in combat the soldier becomes both, he concentrates on the

previously introduced concept of perpetrator trauma. This category of traumatic experience subverts both definitions of PTSD and the Caruthian model of trauma as caused by a single, shattering event, suggesting instead that it rather consists in a gradual and insidious process and accretion of guilt.

A distinctive characteristic of perpetrator trauma is memory torn between two conflicting urges toward silence and confession, the degree of the sense of guilt and the urge to confess depending on the consensus about the war in the home country. The stylistic means to express both guilt and victimhood include the use of the continuous present, and of second-person address, as well as fragmentation and a heightened awareness of detail. The traditional, observable as early as in modernist texts, soldiers' experience of anger at being cheated by institutions and authorities, frustration, alienation, and the sense of all-pervasive boredom seem to contest the established, event-based model of trauma in these narratives.

Another characteristic aspect of the Gulf War memoirs is the tendency, especially among members of ethnic minorities serving in the American army, to look for affinity with the invaded population, expressed in the language implying growing empathy toward victims of violence, as well as sensitivity to a complex position of women fighting in the U.S. forces. This seems inseparable from the institutionally imposed concept of the individual human body as a mechanized and efficient cog in the war machine, totally devoid of feelings dismissed as feminine, which eventually leads to the process of alienation and reification as described in Marxist theories, notably that of Frederic Jameson. Transforming army men into obedient robots involves profound traumatizing effect on the body and mind: the realization of one's inability to act individually, the ensuing disillusionment and frustration result in the growing awareness of a political unconscious which for some in the military may produce deep perpetrator trauma. An interesting addition in this context is a by-effect observable in the remote operators in Nevada, controlling the Predator drone aircraft performing missions that involved killing enemy on other continents. The use of remote military robotics made these operators live in two worlds: the "normal" one, and the life in virtual combat, which exposed them to stress and trauma comparable to those experienced by soldiers on the ground.

Special attention in Gibbs's analysis is given to women soldiers' trauma during the war, exemplified by Kayla Williams's memoir which shows women in the military as doubly victimized, as soldiers and as females. Even though her memoir shows a movement from perpetrator to victim similar to that in the narratives by male authors, it also depicts constant sexual discrimination, sexist behavior, harassment and exploitation that women in the US army experience on an almost daily basis, making them fall victim to an "enemy in the ranks." One edge to their often humiliating treatment by male soldiers and officers is using them in interrogations of Iraqi prisoners only because interrogated by a woman

an imprisoned Muslim soldier feels additionally degraded.

The last chapter of Gibbs's book is devoted to American counterfactual history novels, out of which the author selects three for analysis: Paul Auster's *Man in the Dark* (2008), Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007), and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004). This type of fiction relies on imagining alternative histories and counterfactual reality, and appears to originate in the yearning to rewind real history in order to escape the consequences of real life experiences of trauma, as well as to show that historical necessities are in fact contingent and non-deterministic. All three novels analyzed reach a positive conclusion which rests on familial attachments within some form of family, which leads some critics to wonder whether this kind of solution makes these works implicated in the conservative ideology of the nuclear family. Gibbs points out that a similar narrative in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* problematizes to some extent the values of the nuclear family, interpreted in McCarthy's novel as a destructive force under the extreme circumstances of a dystopian future.

Ultimately, in Alan Gibbs's book the reader finds an impressive survey of trauma narratives of diverse formal, generic, and stylistic qualities, whose main concern is to study literary representations of traumatic historical events in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as well as of their impact on individuals and communities in the contemporary USA. For those of the readers who enjoy and appreciate engaged, sometimes even emotional critical texts, the nearly missionary zeal of some of Gibbs's argumantation and his sharp rhetoric in confrontation with the oversimplified and uncritically emulated models of trauma in contemporary fiction and criticism will considerably add to the unquestionable value of this informative and insightful study. In this Marxism-inflected take on literary treatments of trauma, examining the socio-cultural context of the traumatic event seems to play a much more vital role than performing the traditional—conceptually and aesthetically—psychoanalysis of the traumatized individual subject.

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Sylvia Mayer and Alexa Weik von Mossner, eds. *The Anticipation of Catstrophe. Environmental Risk in North American Literature and Culture*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014. 227 pages.

We no longer live in the age of *unexpected* consequences of our environmental choices. Taught hard lessons by the Dust Bowl, Chernobyl, Exxon Valdez, Deep Water Horizon, Catrina and Fukushima, to name only a few of the worst man-caused ecological disasters of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, we already know humanity is courting a major global catastrophe or a series of catastrophes by taking far too many environmental risks. We live actually *anticipating* and fearing the consequences of our own exponential growth in numbers, of man-caused climate warming, depletion of the world's biodiversity, chemicization of agribusiness, as well as experiments with nuclear energy and genetically modified organisms. Our growing certainty that taking environmental risks entails facing environmental consequences has been documented by a whole body of cultural texts produced in North America in the last couple of decades, many of which are focally concerned with *anticipation* of the environmental catastrophe. These texts, on the one hand, articulate popular fears about the globe's environmental future and, on the other, contribute to making imaginatively and emotionally meaningful those aspects of the environmental mess humanity got itself into that seem so huge and so abstract as to elude an average person's responsive capabilities—eg. global warming. How those cultural texts bear witness to the North American state of mind in the era of environmental anxiety and how they participate in shaping that state of mind is the subject of *The Anticipation of Catastrophe*, a volume of ten ecocritical explorations of American and Canadian novels, films, poetry, journalism and video games that address the subject of environmental risk.

"Risk society," "environmental risk(s)," "manufactured risks," "risk environments," "riskscapes," "risk narratives/fiction"—the sheer recurrence of these terms in all of the articles gathered in the collection edited by Sylvia Mayer and Alexa Weik von Mossner communicates irresistibly a sense of a new sub-category of ecocriticism establishing itself on the international critical scene—the literary risk criticism. Its practitioners draw heavily on the work of the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, especially on his three seminal studies, *Risk Society: Towards the New Modernity* (1992), *World Risk Society* (1999) and *World at Risk* (2003), and on the breakthrough ecocritical publication by Ursula Heise *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008). At the same time, literary risk criticism remains indebted to American founders of the ecocritical school—Lawrence Buell, Scott Slovic and Leonard Scigaj. Following Ursula Heise, contributors to *The Anticipation of Catastrophe* view culture as a repository of "tools for organizing information about risks into intelligible and meaningful stories"

(qtd. 12). These tools include worldviews, narrative patterns, model protagonists, rituals, symbols, images and metaphors, whose role it is to articulate and interpret risks as well as to posit modes for confronting them, all in the effort to maintain the individual's sense of identity and efficacy in the face of dangers. Some literary and cinematic genres, as the contributors to the volume demonstrate, have been employed in this service more often than others, evidently because they are deemed to be especially effective in translating the abstractions of global environmental risks into moral and emotional complexities of individual experience. In addition—predictably—to the genre of the apocalypse, they have included the *bildungsroman*, the picaresque, detective story, the elegy, the domestic narrative, the tragedy. Adapting these genres to spin stories of individuals confronted with various environmental hazards or catastrophies, North American novelists, poets, journalists and filmmakers articulate popular fears and draw scenarios of possible responses to dangers which the risk societies need badly in order to rise out of their environmental stupor and sense of individual and collective helplessness.

The Anticipation of Catastrophe is divided into three sections. The first comprises articles devoted to fiction of global climate change. This most serious of current environmental risks is also the least palpable in day-to-day experience and least digestible to the individual imagination, and so, as Axel Goodbody writes, "everyday life goes on as if [the problem] does not exist" (39). As a "mega-fact," it remains conveniently abstract, or even more conveniently, continues to be denied (despite the near complete agreement of the scientific community about its reality) because ignoring or denying it alleviates in the individual a sense of his or her helplessness and ineffectuality in the face of a challenge so completely outside one person's powers. This widely shared attitude of abdication of a sense of responsibility has not deterred several North American writers from tackling global climate warming in their fiction. As Sylvia Mayer and Axel Goodbody demonstrate it in their articles, Barbara Kingsolver's latest novel *Flight Behavior* is exemplary of "the climate change novel" (again a new ecocritical category, it seems) in which the *buildungsroman* format is employed to give a human face to an abstraction. Kingsolver's main protagonist's growth from an environmentally ignorant Appalachian housewife to a an environmental activist not only translates a global issue into local specificity and social and moral complexities, but also treats with social sensitivity and understanding the confusion of climate change deniers. Goodbody contrasts Kingsolver's hopeful tale of environmental and feminine empowerment with an elegiac German climate change novel, Ilija Trojanow's *Melting Ice* which appeals to the readers' moral conscience by telling a story of a personal tragedy acted out against the background of the melting Arctic. Exploring yet another climate change text, Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming,* Antonia Mehnert focuses on one of the least understood yet

potentially harrowing consequences of global warming, massive migrations, to report the writer's very counterintuitive reflection on rootlessness as actually an asset in the future world. According to Amsterdam, in the world reshaped by rising water levels, rootlessness is likely to become a survival strategy for people forced to endlessly resettle from one non-place to another. On the formal level, this generically problematic novel codes its conclusions about rootlessness through disruptive narration, lack of closure and unexpected developments, all of which locate it outside the categories of environmental discourse identified by Lawrence Buell in his *Writing for an Endangered World*.

Section II of *The Anticipation of the Catastrophe* zeroes in on the nuclear risk. In the article that may be the most memorable in the entire collection, Holger Kersten provides an overview of American press's depiction of radium in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This is a report of the almost unlimited faith in science, almost total ignorance of the effects of radiation, dismissal of the solitary bell-ringers, and boundless optimism about the myriad applications of radium, not only in industry but even in private households, in cosmetics and refreshment drinks. The shock quality of this study derives, of course, from the hair-rising realization that it offers an indirect commentary on the naiveté or irresponsibility or fraudulence of much contemporary popular scientific reporting which—even in the age of far greater skepticism about both science's morality and the reliability of corporation-sponsored research—continues making enthusiastic claims about genetically engineered crops, wonder-working pesticides and nanotechnology that supposedly will take humanity to the next level of fulfilment, comfort, and safety. More recent cases of nuclear risk representation—in contemporary films and in a contemporary comic novel—are analyzed by Alexa Weik von Mossner and by Anne Thiemann respectively. Weik von Mossner studies *The China Syndrome* and *Silkwood* as "emotional machines" (106) which use plotlines driven by anticipation of nuclear contamination to generate real-feeling experiences of risk and thus translate an abstraction into cognitive and emotional reality. Thiemann in turn looks at a novel by Elizabeth Stuckey-French, *The Revenge of the Radioactive Lady,* to comment on the writer's innovative use of the comic mode in risk fiction.

Of the four contributions to section III ("Environmental Risks Across Media") one stands out as a surprise and thus, indirectly, as a commentary on the almost full focus of environmental criticism on literature, journalism, and film to the neglect of the electronic media (which, likewise, have generated a separate critical universe of their own). Colin Milburn's "Video Games and Environmental Risk" reaches out of that critical separatism and considerable mutual ignorance of the new media and the literature critics. While acknowledging the political, economic and environmental crimes of video game industry and video game playing, Milburn

discusses video games as also contributing to green consciousness rising. This is usually done in the most predictable of ways—by casting the game-player as a virtuous green hero (in evident denial that his playing is an act of environmental consumerism) and pitting him against environmental offenders. But the author also identifies two games (*Tasty Planet* and *Shadow of the Colossus*) which in fact craftily open the player's eyes to his/her own complicity in environmental exploitation, and in the end trap him/her in a most uncomfortable moral choice between losing the game and contributing to the destruction of the earth—on the screen, but by implication also in reality.

Another noteworthy essay in this final section is by Karin Höpker, who interprets Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* as a posthuman novel. It is one, as Höpker argues, not only by virtue of its theme—a story of a single survivor of the apocalypse that wiped out mankind and spared only a bioengineered species of posthumans—but also by virtue of its criticism of the humanistic hubris. Atwood's novel imagines the post-catastrophe reality to expose the precariousness of human self-definition which depends on denigrating all other life forms, and she denounces the exploitative and nonsustainable practices which such a definition makes possible. Moreover—and this is a particularly intriguing argument in the essay—Atwood exposes the arrogance of the contemporary tendency to view risk as calculable and thus controllable, and in consequence to mistake scientific fantasies for sound foundations for decision-making. Although Höpker's style here and there makes following her arguments quite a challenge, the effort is certainly worth it.

With all but three contributors to *The Anticipation of Catastrophe* being German scholars, the book demonstrates the scope and the seriousness of German ecocriticism. Evidently, the ecocritical school, until fairly recently dominated by American and British voices, is quickly acquiring a more global countenance and is being reshaped and refocused by critics from non-Anglophone countries. The success of Ursula Heise, who challenged in her study *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* American ecocriticism's preoccupation with the local to redirect its gaze towards the global, is only one of the manifestations of this highly desirable tendency. Contributors to Mayer's and Weik von Mossner's volume bring into their ecocritical explorations of North American literature and culture their European environmental biases. The very emphasis on *global* risks—climate change, nuclear hazards or large scale human migrations—is evidence of what troubles most the European minds, even when they study American cultural texts which, like Kingsolver's novel or *China Syndrome,* are very place specific. There's as yet little effort to venture into comparative ecocriticism in this volume—only Axel Goodbody brings into discussion a German environmental novel—but the differences which he points out between the German and the American

authors in the level of environmental optimism or in their perception of science, expose as culture-specific certain environmental and ecocritical habits of thought.

If there is anything the reader may find somewhat disappointing about this otherwise very insightful and satisfying publication, it is the absence of ecocritical reflection on several nonliterary and noncinematic cultural forms which in the last few decades have engaged powerfully in representing environmental risks—forms, such as painting, photography, performance, popular music and music videos. Alexis Rockman's paintings and Chris Jordan's collages, Edward Burtynsky's and Louis Helbig's photography, Neil Young's musical-environmental crusades, and Greenpeace posters have been serious and original contributors to contemporary North American risk discourse and yet have so far received less than enough serious ecocritical attention. However, this is only a prompting from a reader whose appetite has been whetted by reading these thoughtful and academically impeccable essays. Ecocriticism, because of its ancestral roots in literature departments, has been preoccupied with literature and film, while the public imagination has already been stolen by other media. These other media call for a disciplined and theoretically informed ecocritical analysis. That the volume ends with an essay on computer games seems to promise that this next step is being contemplated.

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Marek Paryż, ed. *Cormac McCarthy*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014. 233 pages.

2014 was a good year for Cormac McCarthy readers in Poland: it saw the republication of *No Country for Old Men* in a new translation by Robert Sudół, followed by a release of the first Polish companion to the writer's *oeuvre*. Given the fact that the re-edition of *No Country for Old Men* capped the decade-long endeavors of Wydawnictwo Literackie to publish all of McCarthy's prose works upon his sudden rise to popularity following the Oscar-winning adaptation of the novel, the companion appears to have arrived at the right juncture. The third volume in the series *Mistrzowie Literatury Amerykańskiej*, intended by the Section of American Literature at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw as a Polish counterpart to Anglo-American companions to leading literary voices

of our time, *Cormac McCarthy* joins its predecessors in what has seemingly become a sustained effort into bringing contemporary American writers nearer to the local readership.

Edited by Marek Paryż, the collection comprises ten essays examining McCarthy as both novelist and playwright. The monograph bears in mind that the road of the writer's output to his Polish readers had been long and winding, for many among his Polish translations were published in a somewhat aleatory order dictated by the demands of the local literary market. The editor of the book thus strives to outline McCarthy's production in a chronological fashion. In a brief introduction to the volume, Paryż provides a clearly delineated overview of the main themes, influences, and formal devices which permeate McCarthy's writing, as well as a brief timeline of his literary career. This introduction precedes a string of texts in which leading Polish Americanists address McCarthy's individual works and his two theatrical plays. Apart from Paryż, who beside editing the companion also contributed two of his own essays, the list of authors includes Kacper Bartczak, Julia Fiedorczuk, Zofia Kolbuszewska, Agnieszka Kotwasińska, Adam Lipszyc, Maciej Masłowski, Piotr Paziński, Alicja Piechucka, Anna Warso, and Mikołaj Wiśniewski. Although the contributions constitute independent entities, their chronological arrangement aids the overall cohesion of the book, assisting the Polish reader in tracing the various thematic, stylistic and formal developments in McCarthy's literary works. Informative but far from dry, the essays assembled in the collection make for a great read for academics and laymen alike, as they help navigate through the ever-expanding criticism on McCarthy while often contesting that criticism with perceptive insight of their own.

The compendium opens with Alicja Piechucka's analysis of *The Orchard Keeper*. In line with its title, Piechucka's essay interprets McCarthy's debut as a travesty of Transcendentalist notions of nature and non-conformism inscribed in the context of the Great Depression. Drawing from Emerson and Thoreau, and citing numerous parallels between McCarthy's first novel and Faulkner's seminal novella "The Bear," Piechucka traces the roots of the writer's trademark naturalism to a subversive reading Transcendentalist tropes, and demonstrates the influence of the Southern Gothic on the book's elegiac revisionism, while also exploring *The Orchard Keeper* as an exposition of themes (journey, violence, liminality, disintegration of traditional communities) and devices (irony and the grotesque) which pervade McCarthy's subsequent production. Maciej Masłowski's take on *Outer Dark* inspects its topography as a "radical challenging of the mimetic paradigm" (46; trans. J. J.) resulting in the novel's rather unique departure towards oneiric yet palpable nihilism which Masłowski elucidates through the lens of Jams R. Giles's concept of the fourth space, Heideggerian expositions of Nietzschean dionysianism,

and Derrida's ruminations on the significance of blindness in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which assist him in underscoring the ambivalence embedded in the transgressive allegories McCarthy employs in his second work. Julia Fiedorczuk's essay on *Child of God* picks up on the theme of transgression, investigating the emotive aspects of communal violence, legalism and empathy in view of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Girard's concept of mimetic violence. Adding to the extensive scope of interpretations of violence as present in the novel, Fiedorczuk perceptively scrutinizes Lester Ballard as a grotesque manifestation of liminality, whose freakish qualities trigger his exclusion from the symbolic order of the community and his subsequent reification, which the scapegoat later perpetrates towards his female victims. Fiedorczuk also points out how, in contemplating transgression, McCarthy plants its seeds in the reader, commanding compassion in a string of bizarrely sympathetic accounts of Ballard's perversities. Concluding the presentation of the so-called "Tennessee Period" is Marek Paryż's engaging discussion of *Suttree* as an errand into existentialism. Paryż reflects on the uncharacteristic genealogy of the novel, tracing its origins to the realist novel of the absurd as defined by David Galloway, on the one hand, and to traditional tall-tales on the other. Identifying diversely pronounced traces of the picaro, the saint, and the tragic hero in the eponymous character, Paryż expounds on the darkly pastoral qualities of *Suttree* which, contrary to many other American novels of the absurd, effectively thwart its unequivocal classifications.

Upon outlining McCarthy's early works, the volume discusses his Western novels, beginning with *Blood Meridian*. Widely considered as the writer's most famous work, *Blood Meridian* is examined in two texts contributed by Zofia Kolbuszewska, and Adam Lipszyc, Piotr Paziński and Mikołaj Wśniewski, respectively. Kolbuszewska's deciphering of McCarthy's seminal Western as a neobaroque narrative takes as its point of departure the Deleuzian concepts of major and minor strategies as adopted by William Eggington in his analysis of the ideologies of neobaroque aesthetics, which she uses to investigate the clash between the two main protagonists in the novel, paying particular attention to its oft-neglected epilogue. Kolbuszewska shifts her focus from Judge Holden, traditionally elected by critics as the pivotal character in *Blood Meridian*, towards the Kid, whom she deliberately dubs "the Child," to better expound the fundamental differences between them. This recalibration leads Kolbuszewska to contend that the mutual interdependency of the two strategies endows McCarthy's novel with an aura of grotesque hybridity, which aids the dialogic depiction of the complex history of the Frontier as an arena for the clash between the center and the periphery. On a formal level, this dialogic interplay carries over to the second text dedicated to *Blood Meridian*, in which Lipszyc, Paziński and Wiśniewski engage with Harold Bloom's canonical interpretation of Judge Holden as an impenetrable figure of

Shakespearian proportions, evaluating the shortcomings of Holden as a Gnostic demiurge, the new Ahab, Kurtz in reverse and "noir Whitman" (148; trans. J. J.). The voices of the three scholars overlap in a polyphonic and mutually complementary dialogue, furthering the points made by Kolbuszewska in the preceding essay. Eventually acknowledging Holden's imperfectly epic status, they agree it is strictly conditioned by the Kid's "impermeable materiality" (135; trans. J. J.). Not insignificantly, the conversation soundly demonstrates that *Blood Meridian* owes as much to the allegorical tradition as it does to McCarthy's thorough historical research which successfully prevents the relegation of the novel to an abstract moral treaty or a catalogue of depravities. Instead, the novel forces upon the reader the role of a witness to a retelling of history, despite the overwhelming fatigue entailed in this demystification. Agnieszka Kotwasińska's analysis of the Border Trilogy (*All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plain*) probes beyond the ostensibly conventional elements of the novels which earned McCarthy popular recognition. In keeping with the title of her essay, Kotwasińska examines the destabilization of narrative formulas in the trilogy as manifested through various methods of temporal representation, such as nonlinearity, a sense of belatedness, and cyclical repetition. Inspired by Deleuze's concepts of machinism and deteritorialization, Kotwasińska convincingly suggests how the three novels amount to a profoundly ironic metanarrative which enables McCarthy to chart a rhizomatic map of US-Mexican borderlands that spans beyond hierarchic dichotomies traditionally embedded in the Western genre and its revisions.

The final three essays in the volume cover McCarthy's latest two novels along with his theatrical enterprises, examining the writer's turn towards minimalist narratives. In her lucid musings on *No Country for Old Men*, Anna Warso provides a close reading of what many critics consider as McCarthy's most accessible and least effective novel. Objecting to reductive interpretations which cast it as an unoriginal derivative of Mc'Carthy's early metaphysics of violence, Warso decodes *No Country for Old Men* as a narrative devoted not so much to evil itself as to its perceptions sifted through the figure of an aging everyman thrust into a world in which things fall apart at an unprecedented pace. Adding much original insight to Jay Ellis's reading of the novel, Warso draws parallels between its formal and narrative facets as filtered through the book's central character, while also tracking how it readdresses some of the key themes of McCarthy's writing and indeed pokes fun at the conservative ideologies some attribute it with. In the penultimate chapter of the collection, Kacper Bartczak ventures an ambitious study of *The Road*, tracing the evolution of its minimalist language through *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*. Bartczak approaches McCarthy's last novel to date as "an experiment in the field of realism" (188; trans. J. J.), an exercise in representing a rapidly vanishing materiality. Interweaving Auerbach's monumental

study of mimesis with studies on Gnosticism and philosophies of late modernity, Bartczak ponders over the increasingly pluralist potentialities of McCarthy's literary language in its changing renditions of materiality. Bartczak's intricate approach enables him to arrive at truly poetic conclusions as he compares the austerity of the book's post-apocalyptic realism to a state of "ontological emergency" (203; trans. J. J.) which enables McCarthy's protagonists to re-entrust crumbling matter with significance and "reverses the hermeneutic cycle initiated in Blood Meridian" (213; trans. J. J.). Closing the volume is Marek Paryż's presentation of McCarthy's theatrical output. Reflecting on *The Stonemason* and *Sunset Limited*, Paryż considers the extent to which McCarthy manages to translate the existential problems inherent to his fiction onto stage environment. Deriving the two plays from the traditions of great American family tragedy and theatre of the absurd, respectively, Paryż interrogates the consequences of the supplantation of implicative qualities of McCarthy's prose with those of direct dialogue in his dramas, perceiving this substitution as a limitation to the critical reception of the ethical dilemmas ingrained in McCarthy's literary output. Encoded within unambiguous rhetoric, he argues, the themes of nostalgia, loss, and epistemological erosion, among others, drift towards unconcealed moralism and thus compare rather unfavorably with McCarthy's dense fiction.

All in all, the companion makes a valuable contribution to the series. Intelligible and discerning, *Cormac McCarthy* provides the Polish reader with a long-awaited introduction to one of America's seminal writers. True to its mission, the compendium clearly delineates McCarthy's revaluations of genres and traditions. A comprehensive review of McCarthy's literary production, the book offers an extensive and up-to-date survey of critical sources, while also contributing refreshing analyses of its own. Although its respective essays rely on diverse methodologies, the collection nonetheless retains substantial cohesion thanks to numerous thematic overlaps which are easily graspable thanks to the sequential order of presentation of individual novels. As such, the publication successfully mirrors what Paryż terms a "homology of style, symbols, and themes" (15; trans. J. J.) which binds the writer's works together. The ability to reflect this homology in the companion will likely enable the local readership to delve beyond Harold Bloom's famous blurb, readily reprinted on each and every cover of McCarthy's Polish translations. Speaking of which, the University of Warsaw Press deserves praise for the series' consistently minimalist layout, a pleasant rarity in the Polish publishing sector.

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Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis, ed. *Dixie Matters: New Perspectives on Southern Femininities and Masculinities*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013. 224 pages.

The collection of essays under review here provides the reader with a reframed analysis of gender in the South—a place that has been, in past and present, tagged by others rather than being allowed its own articulation of identity. Hence, the field of Southern Studies benefits from new critical and scholarly considerations on how cultural artifacts have provided the South with a voice of individuality. Literary and filmic representations in this volume stress how southern gender unveils its multifaceted and dynamic nature when studied in relation to race, class and sexual identity. Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis has edited a very accomplished book that demonstrates two fundamentals of southern femininities and masculinities: they elude any simplistic definition and they are constantly in flux.

American novelist Marilynne Robinson concluded the following on the concept of family, comparing it to other components of selfhood such as race, gender or culture: "The attempt to impose definition on indeterminacy and degree and exception is about the straightest road to mischief I know of, very deeply worn, very well traveled to this day" (87). In their attention to major authors, along with lesser known ones, from early Reconstruction narratives to recent filmic representations of the history of the South, these nine essays, together with Niewiadomska-Flis's introduction, show that the uniqueness of the South has not been artificially created through manipulative literary or historical texts; it is, on the contrary, palpable; and the reader of this volume will perceive this distinctiveness in what the editor defines as "an array of contrasting voices" (16) that do not supply an ultimate classification of southern gender, but do shed light on the contradictions and complexities of male and female representations in the literature of the American South.

The book approaches the matter of southern gender identity from four different perspectives that function as dividing sections. The first organizing theme investigates the relation between female identity and race in the domestic space. The coexistence of black and white women in the limiting frontiers of the home created routines that formed complex emotional connections. The established relations expanded the physical borders to psychological and cultural boundaries that recreated, within the microcosm of the home and its chores, the gender, race, and class struggles experienced in the South.

The second group of essays deals again with the triangle "gender, race and social space," but this time, in the public arena. While these matters pertain to subjectivity, they become perceivable as they materialize in societal structures and behaviors; thus, the evolution of southern masculinities and femininities ought to be affected by their contemporary context; in the case of the South, this is

a social and cultural context that has undergone multiple alterations throughout history: new laws, urban and rural landscape modifications, civil rights, or labor conditions, just to name a few.

The subsequent section in the volume reveals an insight into the southern persona. The book progresses from the intimate southern spaces of the home, onto the communal elements that shape gender constructions, thus, it organically follows with a study of the performativity of male and female identities; that is, how men and women act out selfhood in society. The southerner projects upon his or her physical surroundings sexual, cultural and social interpretations, and in the interaction with this environment, which is charged with meanings, gender develops. As Judith Butler explained in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*: "As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (191). In the convoluted southern past of permanent change, performing gender renders intricate fictional representations of identities in the social stage of the South.

Even though each essay delivers textual illustrations of the respective theorizations of gender, the last section of the book centers specifically on one of the most popular and quoted books and cinematic adaptations about the South: *Gone with the Wind*. Margaret Mitchell's novel (1936) and Victor Fleming's film (1939), even though disregarded as romanticized renderings of southern history, embody, as James C. Cobb explains "a more critical and complex" representation that it may have initially seemed (134). Both have challenged the cavalier and southern belle myths, as well as different New South racial and economic establishments. Consequently, recent concerns with further rewritings of this story prove relevant to engage with a deeper understanding of southern masculinities and femininities.

The volume's purpose of presenting new considerations of southern gender is accomplished to the benefit of the reader due to the diverse range of literary periods and styles considered, which provide an arching overview. Southern historical categorizations have often undermined the cultural affluence of the region but, as these essays demonstrate, originally restrictive designations can also function as sources of research advancement. Toni Morrison claimed in 2013 in an interview with American writer and theatre critic Hilton Als for *The New Yorker* that she accepts labels attached to her work—in her case "black" and "female"—as they can also trigger inspiration: "being a black woman writer is not a shallow place to write from. It doesn't limit my imagination; it expands it" ("Ghosts in the House"). Similarly, southern labels are here reconsidered to reveal new meanings of gender, sexuality, race and class.

The first article following the editor's introduction, Youli Theodosiadou's "The Slave and the Mistress: Opposing Definitions of Womanhood in the Antebellum

South," focuses on how white and black femininities have had to evolve in patriarchal systems of oppression. To illustrate the analysis in the antebellum context, the author centers on two autobiographical texts: Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (Chesnut's diary, covering the years 1861 to 1865, and first published in 1905). Theodosiadou makes clear that the white and black perspectives kept in these personal narratives worked as ways of preserving these women's identities amid experiences of abuse and subjugation—obviously suffered to different degrees, as the texts' authors are a black slave and a white aristocrat, respectively.

Secondly, Susana Mª Jiménez Placer's "Segregation and Civil Rights in the Domestic Sphere: The Mammy Image in *Like One of the Family* and *The Help*" elaborates an analysis of the mammy stereotype in the southern household through these two novels; the first written by Alice Childress, published in 2001, and the latter by Kathryn Stockett, published in 2009. The essay stresses the multiple motherly figures of the black servant, who had to take care of the house, the white children and her own. Jiménez Placer describes how the white lady professed her affection for her servant but remained faithful to segregation and racist social guidelines of behavior. Equally, the white offspring admired and obeyed the mammy but, as they approach maturity, often turned their backs to the woman that infused values and love. Both novels portray the performance of gender and race that took place within these segregated domestic spaces of the South.

Thirdly, and closing the first section of the volume, Marie Liénard-Yeterian compares Stockett's novel with its film adaptation, directed and written by Tate Taylor (2011), in an article entitled "*The Help*: Southern Womanhood Revisited." The fictional setting in both cases is Jackson, Mississippi, in 1962, where segregation and Civil Rights clashed. Liénard-Yeterian states that the story ponders on the attainability of friendship between the white mistress and the black servant, and the possibilities left in such a historical moment for female agency. Skeeter, the main character, is a young white lady who rejects the racist structure where she was brought up, resents her mother for her strict and suppressing rules, and wants to become a writer. She interviews the black female servants of her community, in an attempt to make society appreciate their sacrifices and wisdom. Even though the story gives a white point of view on black history, its relevance, as Liénard-Yeterian explains, lies in the fact that the act of writing strengthens the assertion of southern femalehood.

The forth essay, by Gérald Préher, revises two short stories that have portrayed the conflicts derived from integration of African American children in southern schools. Préher, in this article entitled "Paving the Way for Change: The 1960s South in Shirley Ann Grau's 'The First Day of School' and Joan Williams' 'Spring is Now,'" examines these two texts by white southern women writers, published in

1961 and 1968, respectively. Préher approaches the stories through careful close readings that contemplate the symbolism of details. For instance, in Grau's story, the author has indentified in the careless painting of the school's door, which still shows old layers of color, the failure of desegregation measures in truly changing people's perception of race. In Williams' story, Préher chooses the image of a white girl's lost gold pin, which is eventually found by a black boy from school with whom the girl becomes friends. Once she recovers the pin, she decides not to wear it again, as she equally decides to refuse the concept of race adults around her defend. The selected short fiction discusses the problematics of segregation at a time when it was still an avoided topic, adding to race the perspective of gender.

The subsequent analysis concludes the book's segment on gender, race and the public space. The article by Agnieszka Matysiak is entitled "In the Circles of Dirt and Desire: The Jacobean Spectacle of Cruelty in Rebecca Gilman's *The Glory of Living*" and presents an examination of this highly acclaimed 1999 drama around its main female and male characters, together with an exploration of images of dirt. Matysiak employs the term Jacobean in her study. It refers to the period 1567–1625, when James I was king, first of Scotland, later, in 1603, also of England. In literature, specifically in drama, this era demonstrates an interest for the morally suspicious, and for extreme emotions and behaviors (betrayal, incest, madness, sexual desire, etc.). Contemporary readings of Jacobean excessive tragedies, and their liminality in terms of established values and identities, may remind the reader of the social restlessness of southern history. Matysiak looks at the metaphoric understanding of rubbish and debris in the play, set in Tennessee, in relation to the teenage girl protagonist's strain to build an identity among violence and male dominance.

Constante González Groba's article, "Southern Fictional Tomboys Destabilize Traditional Gender Roles and Dominant Notions of Whiteness," opens the subsection on gender and sexuality performance in the South. It exposes the rewriting of femininity that started in the nineteenth century and contrasted with the ultimate southern female ideal. Due to health concerns, women were encouraged to become stronger and more resilient. In this new performance of gender, women could adopt physical traits and demeanors that had been associated with black women. González Groba expounds how the figure of the tomboy, hence blurred the defined lines of female categorizations, avoiding the terrible consequences of the southern belle stereotype. To illustrate his analysis, González Groba considers five novels: E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859); Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding* (1946) and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940); Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960); and, finally, Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes of the Whistle Stop Café* (1987). These four southern women writers,

according to the author of the essay, provide her female characters with an alternative to normative gender portrayals, which can be achieved through sexual ambiguity.

The seventh article in the volume, "Between Permeability and Peculiarity: The Poetics of Gender in *Jingling in the Wind* by Elizabeth Madox Roberts" by Gisèle Sigal, approaches this white Kentucky writer from a lesser known novel: *Jingling in the Wind* (1928), which is a fantasy that singles out the book from the accurate historical representations from women's perspective, found in her main novels. However, Sigal demonstrates that Roberts's interest in the female inner world remains central in this fanciful story. This is because in this mystical world of two rainmakers, a man and a woman, the chaos and harmony that coexist can function, according to this scholar, as representatives of female and male identity subtleties. In this combined genderization of her fiction, Roberts can expand her more frequent female stance. Therefore, Sigal points out that, in this fantasy, emotions and sensitivity become common to both female and male personalities, in order to make room for fluidity in gender definitions.

The last two chapters of the book read as thought provoking reconsiderations of *Gone with the Wind*. Firstly, Emmeline Gross presents the essay "Hidding in Plain Sight: The Vanishing Male Figure in *Gone with the Wind*," studying Margaret Mitchells's novel within the frame of masculinity studies. Gross underlines the deficit in evaluations of male characters due to white heroes being the norm. Thus, white men in fiction have been placed on the position of role models of masculinity, preventing the emergence of diverse discussions on the complexities of southern manhood; and, in that manner, male characters have been made metaphorically invisible as subject of research in the field of Southern Studies. As the author of this article establishes, gender constantly develops as a social and cultural element; thus, it proves interesting to examine the characters of Ashley and Rhett in opposition, in a book that seems to be used as refuge from the reality of the ever-changing South. Initially both characters appear to be stereotypical: Ashley, the gentleman who fights for the Confederacy; and Rhett, the mischievous Carpetbagger. However, through a more detailed reading, these hyperbolic representations offer complex definitions of masculinities and the male body. Here, the war hero does not comply with the expectations of the male ideal, and the rebel proves to be able to act according with prescribed masculinities. The combination of both characters is presented as an alternative to subvert rooted gender identifications that would more suitably fit the transfiguring South.

Beata Zawadka brings the volume to an end with her essay "I Have (Not) Forgot Much, Cynara! *Gone with the Wind* as Global Sensibility." The title of Mitchell's novel was inspired by the Decadent English writer Ernest Dowson's 1896

poem "Non Sum Qualis eram Bonae Sub Regno Cynarae," which is the title of Horace's *Odes* (Book 4, 1), and translates as "I am not as I was in the reign of good Cinara." Dowson's Cinara represents, as British poet Carol Rumens explained for *The Guardian* in 2011 ("Poem of the Week"), a fixation with a past lover: this idea resonates with *Gone with the Wind*'s Scarlett and her loss of the old South, Tara, Ashley, Rhett, her daughter, and father, among others that could be identified in the novel. The author of this essay studies six rewritings of Mitchell's novel: Alexandra Ripley's *Scarlett* (1991); Régine Deforges's *La bicyclette bleue* (2000); Julien Green's *Le pays lointains* (1987); Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976); Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* (2001); Donald McCaig's *Rhett Butler's People* (2007); the TV series *Scarlett* (1994), an adaptation from Ripley's novel; and the film *Noce i dnie* (1975), based on Maria Davrowska's eponymous saga (1931–1934). These examples are selected in order to illustrate that the original pastoral convention of *Gone with the Wind* can be read, not only as a white romanticizing of the past of the South, but, alternatively, as a popular cultural phenomenon that touches on the complexities of masculinities and femininities not only in the slave plantation context, but even in later and also contemporary representations of democratic structures in literature and film.

The nine chapters in *Dixie Matters*, along with Niewiadomska-Flis's introduction, prove both timely and relevant to the emerging concerns with gender within the field of Southern Studies. The essays are not cohesively linked to one another but each individual study contributes extensively to the ultimate success of the present volume: offering new considerations on and readings of masculinities and femininities in the history of the South and its fictional representations. As well as that, the book includes a unique constituent that connects the different analyses: the collection of illustrations by Polish painter Leszek Niewiadomski. He specifically created for this publication the oil pastels that precede each chapter, as well as the cover. Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis curated the paintings and they represent the main theme of each article, and, all together, render an additional artistic dimension to this critical study.

For me, the reading of this volume evokes the words of eminent African American scholar Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964) who, in *A Voice From the South* (1988), reflected on race and gender in the following way: "[African Americans have been a muffled force in the history of the South]. And of that muffled chord, the one mute and voiceless note has been the sadly expectant Black Woman" (10). *Dixie Matters* contributes to the prevention of any further minority voices being gagged within Southern Studies thanks to its inclusive considerations of fictional representations of gender, race, class and sexuality. On the whole the book works exceptionally well, presenting innovative explorations of well-known novels and films, as well as discovering less studied works of different periods and

nationalities. And, even though the reader would have welcomed a unifying final conclusion, the four thematic sections that organize these contributions create a coherent core argument on new nuanced interpretations of southern masculinities and femininities.

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