

## REVIEWS

**David H. Evans, ed. *Understanding James, Understanding Modernism*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. 272 pages.**

Classical American pragmatism, the pragmatism of Peirce, James, and Dewey, keeps returning and energizing various areas of contemporary intellectual culture. Pragmatism, both classical and in its “neo” version, has been a vast, flexible movement spanning surprisingly diverse forms of the life of the American mind, and—in a truly American fashion—synthesizing the material and the spiritual aspects of this life. Pragmatism’s strength has always resided in the intellectual and spiritual boisterousness displayed by its founding fathers, figures who, among other things, were responsible for the transition that the American culture was undergoing, from the eruptions of its Romantic genius to its codification in respective modernist expert cultures.

One of those key figures is William James—a powerful and rich personality whose influences continue to be many. A few years ago, I obtained a volume of selected poems by Peter Gizzi, a poet I had written on and translated into Polish. The book carries an epigraph from James in which the philosopher postulates a continuity between the realms of matter and of the spirit, the idea coming from his groundbreaking *Principles of Psychology*. I was delighted at this find, and immediately remembered that Gizzi had been a great fan of a study by Joan Richardson, *A Natural History of Pragmatism*, from 2007, which explores the myriad ways in which various American pragmatisms (those found in figures as different as Jonathan Edwards and Gertrude Stein) nourished the literary thought. I also remembered that Gertrude Stein, one of the poets that Gizzi’s formalist linguistic styles are indebted to, was William James’s student and one of his most enthusiastic followers among the literary modernists.

Stein’s often quoted tribute to James (“Is life worth living?—Yes, a thousand times yes, when the world still holds such spirits as prof. James,” qtd. on p. 3 in the reviewed volume), next to remarks such as the one by Frost, who applauds James as “the most valuable teacher” he had at Harvard (160), serve as a useful entry to the central idea behind a volume of essays entitled *Understanding James, Understanding Modernism*, edited by David H. Evans and published by Bloomsbury in 2017. The task that the editor and the authors gathered in the publication had taken upon themselves has been to illustrate the various channels of logical continuity and correspondence that are active between James’s philosophy and Western literary modernism, both as a general movement and as the creative output of an impressive array of particular authors, from Henry, William’s brother, to Stein, Joyce, Proust, Frost, Stevens, and Pound. As adjacent to these connections, the volume discusses James’s international liaisons, particularly the relation with Bergson, his impact on various other philosophers, both in the US and Europe, as well as his relation to modern political thought. The discussions are complemented by a section of shorter articles which serve as glossary entries on selected key terms from the various fields explored by James’s restless thought.

Evans has given the volume a lucid and convincing structure. The first part presents a survey of the major areas and directions in which James’s philosophical

thinking developed, from his original contributions to psychology, through commentary on religion, to his brand of pragmatism, culminating in his theories of experience and the inherent pluralism of the universe. This conceptual background is then treated, by the authors gathered in the second part, as a platform of departure for a series of discussions illustrating either the direct influences or the more general parallels that are at play between James and the giants of literary modernism. In all, the volume presents a daunting panoply of James's impacts and contributions that are detected in psychology, philosophy, literature, sociology, religious studies, political theory, and sociology.

Part 1 of the volume conceptualizes the fascinating path that James's thought traverses from his theories of consciousness, via his intuitions on religion, to his pragmatist theories of truth and the model of experience that fits what Nietzsche—whom it makes sense to treat as a continental parallel to James's contribution to modernism—would call a world of becoming rather than being. Diversified and picturesque as this path is, it is also amazingly coherent and Evans's volume does a great job in bringing forth its consistency.

James's philosophy begins with his insight into the fluid mechanics of human consciousness. The concept of reality as flux, which, together with his theory of experience, constitutes the core of his philosophy, culminating in his pragmatism and theory of the plastic universe, have their proper root in his psychological studies of the nature of consciousness. James, alongside Bergson in Europe, is responsible for making us aware of the stream-like nature of thought. We have thoughts and meanings in fluid continuities—such is the main thrust of this thesis—not in atomistic portions. On the other hand, the streams of consciousness are portioned out and attended to selectively by humans as individualized organisms. A personality is a particular set of habits which are responsible for the way in which the singular human organism responds to modulations of experience.

One of the paramount consequences of this model is James's insistence on the importance of relations or transitions between the states of consciousness, which on a different level may be considered as transitions between portions of experience or, simply, of reality. As Owen Flanagan and Heather Wallace remind us in the opening chapter, on the level of individual consciousness these transitions are detected as moods and other aspects of the conscious life, and James's brilliant idea is that we should pay attention to the particular emotional, cognitive, but also linguistic modulations of these relations (that is why James turns our attention to “the feelings of *and*, the feeling of *if*...”—the linguistic entries into experience, this thought leading directly to the poetry of Gertrude Stein).

The dynamic and plastic model of consciousness stands behind James's intriguing claims, later in his career, that the crux of our reality is a sort of primordial substance, preceding all sorts of subject/object splits. This substance is an absolute dynamics of flow and changeability which he calls “immediate flux” or “pure experience.” The way this foundational level of reality can be approached and explored is called “radical empiricism.” Joseph Campbell shows, in his contribution, how this concept returns us to the fluid model of consciousness as, again, “an affair of relations.” The world is much more a matter of our negotiating or participating

in alternate sets of relations—whose extensions always exceed any particular here and now—than strict, one-directional, representational reports issued by a clearly delineated subject in reference to an equally clearly delineated and separate object. James's much more dynamic epistemic model—anticipating not only modernist but also post-modernist insights—takes us almost literally out of our skins: to sit in a room and to understand it will be a completely different real experience depending on the different, optional, networks of relations we explore—either those that refer to the biography of the perceiving human subject or those pertaining to the no less fluid “biography” of the physical space coming into being. Thus, the subject and the object will be provisional aspects of the vaster flux-like substance of the “pure experience.”

The dynamic models of consciousness and experience are matched and complemented, in the middle part of James's career, by his views on religion, his pragmatist treatment of truth, and, finally, his vision of the plastic universe.

Especially the first two of these areas are affected by the quality of James's thought that is also responsible for the basic difference between his theory of flux and all those other theories that see reality, desire, truth, or subject-object relations as a matter of flow. For example, where contemporary approaches derived from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze see reality as permeated by flows of desires and vitalistic energies unobstructed by any contour of individual self, subjecthood, or personality, James's philosophy confronts flux with the reality of the always discrete, humanized, individualized sets of needs and desires, which, on a different level, constitute whatever is stable about our personality. The James-Deleuze relation is discussed in the volume by Barry Allen who concentrates on *A Pluralistic Universe*. While Allen stresses the affinity between the two thinkers, I would point out the difference: in James, unlike in Deleuze, flux is checked with individual human intervention which is, of course, also a form of complicity with the flux. This reciprocity is first noted in his reflection on religion.

James, as Nietzsche in Europe, shows gods and divinities to be concepts whose efficacy is impossible without the strictly human realms of needs, desires, conflicts and purposes. Micheal Bacon discusses the revolutionary approach to these correlations in James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, a study of the psychology of religion as it features in particularized experience of individuals, to show an unfailing originality of this volume. For James, gods—just as all our other conceptual frameworks—evolve in time, and are inextricably dependent on our inner psychological conflicts. Thus, to uphold the religious view of reality is, predominantly, to display an active stance toward the universe as an evolving whole—a view that James put together in his probably most well-known single piece, the essay “The Will To Believe,” which is discussed separately in Evans's volume by John J. Stuhr. The combined reading of the chapters by Bacon and Stuhr helps to show how James managed to signal a paradigmatic shift in our understanding of the religious mind: for him religion is a name for a capacity of maintaining a twofold belief. First, it is a belief in the plasticity of a world as a place whose future is not pre-determined. As I would argue, based on the discussions found in Evans's volume, the very idea of the plastic universe is, on its deepest level, a religious response to the world. Second, it is a belief that it is the human stance toward the world that constitutes a decisive force that pushes reality toward its never pre-determined futures.

A one word name for such modernist translation of religion is *meliorism*; in a sense, this is what James's philosophy submits in the face of what Nietzsche would have called the death of traditional gods. But where Nietzsche dramatically over-reacts to his own diagnosis with the radical idea of the need to breed a post-human species (his anxiety-ridden concept of the *übermensch*), James proposes a much more viable option of observing our movements within our own plastic universe with which we ceaselessly interreact and communicate on many levels. Meliorism, thus, is a stance fitting a world that—against the ages-old philosophies of the varieties of absolute monism—cannot ever be arrested by any single key-word concept that, as those philosophies hoped, would arrest and freeze our understanding of it in one stable contextual frame. James develops this idea in his lectures on *A Pluralistic Universe*. As it is shown in the contribution by Barry Allen, the main significance of this idea is that James's ontology is deeply and irrevocably pluralist, with the reverberations of this ontology predictable on the level of cultural politics.

All strands of James's philosophy seem to come together in his analysis of the world's indigenous plasticity. As an organic ingredient of this plasticity, we react to its exigencies, and our reactions are forms of commitment. When they obtain a particular form of intensity, they may be considered as forms of religiousness. If we wish a more secular approach, we enter another vast area of James's heritage—his "pragmatism." Truths—as Alan Malachowski reminds us in the volume—are names, according to James, not so much of stable correspondences to reality (the flux view of reality making this Cartesian concept antiquated), but of actively modulated "agreements"—which should be seen as results of our continuous struggles with reality. They are forms of engagement in which we break the flux into particular realities. Thus, as Malachowski reminds us, James's pragmatism is his way of pointing toward the "world-completing powers [of] humans," our "truth-creating powers" (71). Thus, James's theory of truth returns us to the individualistic side of James's thinking. Life, in James, is worth-living as a form of the individualized form of negotiating the flux. We confront the energetic vastness of the plastic universe, its ridiculously disproportionate energetic excess, through personal existence that is always "a genuine struggle and strenuous engagement that demands our creative and transformative energies" (38).

Two conclusions come to mind as commentary to the first section of the volume. The first one is offered early on by the main editor, David H. Evans. Namely, James should be seen as a thinker who is pivotal in a paradigmatic shift: his exuberant, many-fielded writing helps intellectual culture to leave behind the strictures of Cartesianism, and at the same stroke to pave a way for those ideas of the fluidity of our truths and meaning that have been explored by the thinkers of late modernity and post-structuralism. The inclusion among them of figures like Richard Rorty seems obvious (James, next to Dewey, was Rorty's personal hero), but it is worth pointing out that Evans also mentions Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Deleuze.

The second commentary is my own. I would venture the thesis that James's thought offers an alternative to the more up-to-date trends derived from the advocates of the post-human, Deleuzian, new-materialist fluidity. In James, the confrontation of flux reveals the animalistic and evolutionary genealogy of the human, but it does not abolish the contours of a certain individualized, interpretive, and will-oriented entity.

Truth, meaning, in some sense the flow of experience itself, make sense only because there are pragmatically limited, physically embodied, finite, mortal individuals, whose limited biology dictates to them the respective ways in which they simply have to negotiate and configure the flows of desire. These carvings, in turn, help to create the truths and realities out of the flux. The universe, that is, with all of its impressive plasticity, makes sense only because there are those fragile, finite, desiring beings, such as humans, whose finitude also spells the necessary forms of limiting the flow.

Part 2 of the volume concentrates on the influences and parallels between James's thought and literary modernism. The chapters on these literary correspondences are preceded by an elaboration of the rich and fruitful James-Bergson relation, offered by Rosa Slegers, who reminds the reader how both philosophers were united by their staunch animosity toward the "vicious intellectualism," which is the position according to which stable concepts capture the essence of reality. Instead, the task of being closer to what is really going on around us, claim both James and Bergson, is fulfilled better by diving back into the fluid flux of experience. As far as forms of writing are involved, such dive can only be effected through the kind of language that is seeking states of suspension and flexibilities that steer away from clichéd and stultifying structures of established concepts. This is precisely the approach to writing that is shared by both of the James brothers and the parallels between their respective endeavors—in William's best and most fluid philosophical prose and in Henry's complex stylistic exercise of his later novels—are examined in the chapter by Jill Kress Karn.

The following chapters pursue further the literary bearings that William James's ideas have had on the giants of European modernism: David H. Evans examines how James's emphasis on the temporal transitiveness of experience is reflected in Gertrude Stein's attempt to render it in her forms of repetition; Mark Richardson looks at Frost's approach to religious experience through the lenses of James's translation of religiousness as an active/creative stance toward the universe; Kristen Case shows how Stevens's technique of observing the mind at play can be viewed as a version of James's linking truth and belief by the concept of a "hypothesis," with Stevens's poems discussed as devices through which we can observe the transformations of the hypotheses by which we test reality; Patricia Rae revisits grounds she has covered in her 1997 book on the pragmatist lineage of imagist poetry (*The Pragmatic Muse*), where she discusses Pound's image and Stevens's "fiction" as forms, again, of James's "hypothesis" viewed as diagnostic, interpretive devices. Rae expands her earlier argument by including in the picture George Orwell's political writing. The two remaining chapters on the literary connections, by Gian Balsamo and Lisi Schoenbach, treat the contribution that James's concepts of consciousness, embodied memory, and personality as collection of habits provide for our understanding of the stylistic and cognitive complexities found in the prose of James Joyce and Marcel Proust. Part 2 closes with two more essays, by Michela Bella and Robert Danish, which touch on, respectively, on the reception of James in Italy and his influence on modern political thought.

The collective thrust of the chapters gathered in this part is found in illuminating the proximity of the philosophical theory and the literary technique. James's prose itself is shown as an attempt, through a kind of philosophical language

that does not shrink from metaphor, to prepare the way for those literary experiments that underline the reality of change and relationality. The authors in this part present how the various particular writerly techniques devised by the leading writers of the modernist aesthetic revolution were attempts to align consciousness with the idea that meaningful experience must constantly negotiate its singular contours with and alongside, not against, the reality of permanent change.

As an afterthought, I would add that the discussions in Part 2 of the volume provide vistas that go beyond High Modernism. They also convincingly, if indirectly, suggest that continuous attention to James's thought makes very good sense in reference to those aesthetics that have grown out of the modernist moment and are part of the contemporary moment.

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**Rüdiger Kunow. *Material Bodies: Biology and Culture in the United States*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018. 483 pages.**

Rüdiger Kunow's massive volume offers an intricate analysis of intersections of and interdependencies between biology and culture. In the sections that make up the book, the author demonstrates numerous and complex ways in which biology organizes and challenges disparate life experiences, and, in view of recent biomedical technologies, poses new theoretical questions about life, ethics, and American identity. According to Kunow, biology has become thoroughly culturized, and has transformed into "a discursive anchor in debates about what can count as a good life worth having, what relations humans develop toward their bodies, their offspring, their own old age" (7). Moreover, a significant part of cultural productions is expressed via biological imagery, thus testifying to the way biology expands beyond the sphere of exclusively scientific projects and permeates everyday practices. To bring together all these questions and concerns, the author engages various critical approaches, from materialist cultural critique, Marxism, gender studies, ecocriticism, Foucauldian biopolitics, science and technology studies and posthumanism.

While the relationship between biosciences and the humanities is not a new idea, and Kunow acknowledges influences of such new interdisciplinary fields as medical humanities, literature and medicine (and the journal of the same title), and narrative medicine to name just a few examples, *Material Bodies* calls for a profound analysis of the two-directional engagements between sciences and the humanities. "If the cultural side of biocultures," writes Kunow, "is understood merely as offering cultural counseling to scientists or as providing the ethics component required in federal grant applications in the U.S., then the biocultures project will run the risk of merely 'reinforcing the structural problematic that too often governs disciplinary relations in the academy: the sciences are rich, the humanities poor'" (Clayton et al. qtd. in Kunow 20). What Kunow repeatedly emphasizes and demonstrates with a myriad of examples is the fact that literary and cultural criticism may significantly expand contexts in which biology and biocultures operate.

As promised in the title, Kunow offers an analysis of biological influences on American culture, which, in his view, has recently been marked by the process he calls “biologization of the signifier America” (17). Even though the proliferation of biology-related images and language is observable everywhere, the author claims that the discipline of American Studies has in fact shown little interest in “how biology (of the human body or the natural habitat) has been foundational for the formation and stabilizing of ‘America’” (21). This seems to be a problematic statement considering a long history of processes aimed at precisely stabilizing the definition of who counts as American (or more importantly, who does not) using (pseudo)scientific discourses, that of biology included. Similarly, Kunow’s take on race and gender is equally problematic. The introduction does offer an extensive summary of how biology is implicated in the production of racialized and gendered bodies, along with analyses of constructivist theories which underpin the critique of these categories as well as the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. The author explains that his emphasis on biology as a “foundational feature in thinking about race and gender” allows him to demonstrate how “the figurative energy of the discursive field of biology has been a powerful medium to render human beings differently present, at times even highly visibly different, and thus vulnerable, in the public sphere” (30). That said, in the following paragraph Kunow provides “a note of caution” that “[t]his is not a book about ‘race,’ nor, for that manner, about ‘gender’” (31). While the author is indeed at liberty to choose his theoretical and thematic framework, ironically, the analyzed contexts and cultural and literary examples clearly demonstrate that, as far as biology and the effort to stabilize the idea of America are concerned, race and gender do come to the forefront.

In the first section, entitled “The Materialism of Biological Encounters,” Kunow concentrates on the spaces of interactions between biology and mobility. Drawing from Louis Althusser’s work, Kunow refers to these interactions as “biomedical encounters” and demonstrates how these seemingly unambiguous communal events produce serious social geopolitical consequences. In a series of examples, the chapter shows how the context of human mobility creates situations of the mingling of biological materials (bacteria, microbes, and viruses, to name just a few). Thus, human mobility can no longer be perceived solely in terms of individual interactions, productive in their intellectual and cultural potential, but instead becomes subject to policies regarding the prevention and containment of contagious diseases such as SARS, MERS, avian and pig influenzas or HIV-AIDS. The examples selected by Kunow—the case of Mary Mallon better known as Typhoid Mary, the Bubonic Plague of 1899-1900 and the discourse of the “Yellow Peril” used in relation to Chinese immigrants as well as epidemics of Yellow Fever in New York (1668) and Boston (1691), to mention just a few—aptly illustrate various critical debates that biomedical encounters initiate: mobility and (im)migration, the postcolonial context of human mobility, the spread of epidemics in public discourse, and public health and the methods of its protection. The topic of public health and its representation in mass media is emphasized in the second part of the first section. Here, Kunow uses various literary and pop culture examples to illustrate the “culturization” of mass disease. The proliferation of representations of mass diseases is a fascinating phenomenon as well as a somewhat ironic choice of

emphasis: even though cardiovascular diseases and cancer are the main causes of death in the United States, it is rare infectious diseases such as MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) that receive the most attention (Kunow 132-33). Moreover, using a number of contemporary films and literary works, Kunow analyzes the emergent language of mass disease which is characterized by the well-known pervasive application of military metaphors (invasion) as well as the production of new terms and concepts (“biological vulnerability” or “biological containment”).

Section two, entitled “Not Normatively Human: Cultural Grammars and the Human Body,” begins with an exhaustive analysis of the creation and functions of bodily norms in Western culture. Biology actively participates in the creation and promotion of categories defining normalcy and setting standards of beauty, health, fitness, etc. thus demonstrating its entanglement with cultural ideas about what constitutes the normal. Drawing from the work of Georges Canguilhem, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas, the author reveals the often contradictory nature of logic applied in the creation of norms: norms rely on binaries, they are descriptive and prescriptive, and they are fixed and at the same time flexible to react to changing historical and social conditions. To illustrate this versatility of norms, Kunow analyzes such diverse phenomena as the cultural requirement to comply with body ideals (Audre Lorde’s *Cancer Journals*), ageism and disability. Ageism and disability are discussed in separate, lengthy subsections and perspectives are offered from the critical positions of Age Studies and Disability Studies. Again, Kunow provides many interesting cultural and literary examples (Philip Roth’s *Everyman*, the autobiographies of disabled war veterans, Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People*) to demonstrate how the conditions of being old and disabled depart from what the culture defines as normal. However, these categories “do not have a stable referent in bodily conditions (be they mental or physical) but are instead realized in communicative interaction in the public domain” (321). It is precisely in social interactions where Kunow identifies the space of emerging non-normative categories that reject the confining logic of binaries.

The third section, entitled “Corporeal Semiotics: The Body of the Text/ the Text of the Body,” begins with questions about the ways in which genetics and molecular technologies redefine the ways in which the body is given cultural and social presence and how its perceptions are dramatically challenged by a possibility of intervention on the body’s smallest possible building blocks. Genetics, which as Kunow rightly observes, has quickly entered popular culture to produce a rich body of technologically-driven imagery, has also created new discourses pertaining to describe new experiences of corporeality. To provide a theoretical and thematic framework for these considerations, Kunow discusses the relationship of soma and seme, body and meaning, materiality and culture, and also the textuality of the body and what such a concept may entail in the era of genetics. Again, the discussion aptly illustrates the author’s point and gives a sense of the complexity of the problem. The section addresses topics as diverse as Emmett Till’s case, harvesting organs for transplants, genetic screening, and technology-based body enhancement. In the middle subsection, Kunow shifts his gaze to the theme of pain and the question of multiple meanings ascribed to this particular manifestation of embodiment. The last subsection provides a thematic closure to the two previous subsections as it discusses various images of cancer(s).

Drawing on the seminal work of Susan Sontag and Siddhartha Mukherjee's more recent *The Emperors of All Maladies*, Kunow summarizes the most prevalent ideas about cancer and its cultural representations, and moreover, demonstrates how discourses of biotechnologies expand this discussion. An interesting example is Kunow's analysis of a case described in Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, which "invites renewed reflection of the spatial and temporal circumference of the human body and human life in general" (404).

*Material Bodies* is impressive in its scope, a well-researched and elegantly written book about the intersections of biology and culture, a connection that cannot be ignored in the context of contemporary applications of biomedical technologies. Kunow poses probing questions and provides countless examples from popular culture, literature, film, and biosciences. Moreover, he can boast fluency in an array of theoretical approaches, which demonstrates to what great extent the analyzed phenomena engage a number of disciplines and create new discourses of approaching the human body and the experience of life in the twenty-first century. The book is indeed an interdisciplinary and highly engaging project.

However, there arises the question of whether limiting the scope of inquiry would not have greatly benefited the entire project. In fact, each of the three sections provides ample material for a separate book, which, considering the author's erudition and dedication, would produce excellent results. Moreover, a more limited scope would allow for a more exhaustive analysis of the selected cultural and literary texts, and a concentration on issues that are not in the background of inquiry, for instance race and gender. More emphasis on the interconnection between genetics and race would allow for a demonstration of how biosciences are often employed to recreate well-known racial categories and how they become implications implicates in biocolonialism practices, which in turn would serve as an opportunity to engage in a discussion of the excellent work of Jenny Reardon on the Human Genome Project.

Finally, considering the size of the book, the organization into chapters calls for a better execution. *Material Bodies* consists of three long sections and, as the reader learns from the contents, smaller subsections which in the text are referred to as chapters. However, there is almost no visual separation (line breaks, titles in bold, a larger font) which announces the beginning of a new chapter, which leaves the reader with a sense of dealing with three massive thematic sections. Moreover, the closing chapter does not offer a comprehensive summary of the presented arguments. Instead, the author concentrates on multiplying questions to ponder, whereas the reader would perhaps appreciate an elegant summary. Similarly, the book does not include an index, which, considering the size and scope of the project, is a serious disadvantage and makes navigating the text truly difficult.

All in all, *Material Bodies* is a highly recommended text for all scholars interested in the topic of biocultures, as well as those searching for interesting material for research or class use. Kunow poses penetrating questions and offers illuminating analyses supported by well-selected literary and cultural examples.

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**Justyna Włodarczyk. *Genealogy of Obedience: Reading North American Dog Training Literature, 1850s–2000s*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018. 254 pages.**

Diogenes was the first scholar known to (Western) history who was fascinated by the figure of the dog. So much so that he wanted to live like one, whereas his school of thought became known as the cynics (which translates to “canines” from Greek). The thing that Diogenes valued most about dogs was their freedom, as they were able to roam the streets without much regard for conventions “whether of religion, of manners, of dress, of housing, of food, or of decency” (Russell 247). Dogs do not care about one’s social status, they treat people on the basis of how they act towards them and who they *really* are. The same sentiment is expressed by Cesar Millan, the (in)famous self-proclaimed dog whisperer, who values dogs for their ability to just let go and live in the moment, as he has expressed it in many of his shows. However, apart from the 25 centuries separating both men—Diogenes was born in 412 BC, Millan is one of the most prominent faces of today’s obedience training—it is their approach towards the supposed freedom of dogs that is the main difference between them. How is it possible that over such a span of time dogs have turned from individual and independent beings, as Diogenes saw them, to elements that needed to be tamed and controlled?

As it is often the case, things are not that simple nor (luckily) that bad. In *Genealogy of Obedience: Reading North American Dog Training Literature, 1850s–2000s* Justyna Włodarczyk uses a Foucauldian framework to discuss books devoted to dog training. The ideas of obedience and control, as understood and developed by the French philosopher, have never been applied to the said topic, which makes Włodarczyk’s work truly groundbreaking. Still, she stresses herself that her book is not “contributing to Foucauldian scholarship; I see it contributing to animal studies” (3). So while Foucault’s discussion of biopolitics and biopower enriches her argument, from an animal studies perspective it is Włodarczyk’s retracing of the history of dog training that makes the book captivating.

The titular genealogy is also understood in a Foucauldian sense as a critical analysis of the emergence of certain beliefs, in this case associated with and applied to dog training. What makes Włodarczyk’s work (even more) perverse is that she chooses to discuss American dog training literature, which, at least in theory, should be all about the freedom associated with being an animal/pet. Appreciative and protective of their own freedoms, it becomes clear since the beginning of Włodarczyk’s analysis that Americans were not as willing to apply the same logic to their animal compatriots. The narrative that emerges from dog training literature is not comprehensive, nor one-sided, however, there are some patterns which the author masterfully detects. The trends, approaches and observations seem somewhat stuck between two poles of understanding dogs as either parts of the animal or the human world. In a sense, the stories about dogs are also stories about their humans.

The point of departure of this work, the second half of the nineteenth century, marks the emergence of dog training literature. The books were addressed to white, middle-class urban dwellers as only they could afford the luxury of living with a trainable dog. As Włodarczyk reiterates, not all dogs were considered worthy of training. The idea of applying the Victorian ethics of kindness to dog training was of course not as noble or kind as it sounds. The corporal punishment was clearly involved, but it was executed for the

good of the dog, not out of spite or anger. Throughout all of the works analyzed in this book it becomes evident that their authors firmly believed that every form of instruction was supposed to benefit the pet, even though the approaches towards man's best friend varied across time. It is worth pointing out (as Włodarczyk does in her work) that these changes were connected with the changes experienced by humans, which, in turn, affected the dog training discourse.

In the 1850s dog training went beyond the confines of the circus or the show and was presented as an educational activity for humans. While some books on dog training already appeared before that time, they were reserved for hunting and working dogs. Now the companion animal was elevated to the level of trainability, which means it was embraced by the human world, allowed to enter the realm which was out of its reach at the inception of the nineteenth century. Dog training books from that time are devoted to tricks, which stand in strong opposition to the tasks reserved for hunting and working dogs.

These are the topic of Chapter 2, which is the only one abstaining from the issue of trainability. It deals rather with eugenics, which is of course a topic that appeared through the years in various books, yet birth was never proof or reason for a dog's (in)ability to master the discipline measures exhibited by man. The chapter presents the differences between the approaches towards the hunting dogs of slaves and slaveholders. In doing so it highlights the middle-class, white character of dog training literature. Slaves used their dogs to hunt smaller prey and they were most concerned with their usefulness, whereas for slaveholders hunting was a ceremony, and their well-trained dogs were an integral part of it. Killing animals was regarded as a sport in which the malnourished, poorer dogs kept by the slaves clearly could not participate. That is why they were often disposed of whenever the owners considered them a nuisance. Włodarczyk combines the story of slaves' dogs with the present-day representations of the pit bull, considered a typical African American breed, demonized and often exterminated due to the fear they attack white Americans.

This chapter may seem to depart from the general narrative of the book, however, due to its peculiarity it underlines the intertwining notions of training and breed, which at times were considered dependent on each other. More often than not though, trainability was (and is now) seen as an ability inherent to any dog. The tools of discipline were mostly the same: the whip and the collar, but in the second half of the twentieth century dog training experienced a gentler turn, as both were replaced by the lead. The lead was eventually dropped, at least to some extent, as the basis of training is now concerned with body control, positive reinforcements and fun. While some dog trainers, like Millan, serve as paragons of a more manly, anti-intelligent obedience training, it is this feminine, gentler and kinder approach that has dominated today's dog training. Thanks to it the dog is appreciated for its individuality, it once again became a creature which was so valued by Diogenes, not fully wild nor domesticated.

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**Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska. *Dziecko, rodzina i pleć w amerykańskich inicjatywach humanitarnych i filantropijnych w II Rzeczypospolitej* [The Child, the Family, and Gender in the American Humanitarian and Philanthropic Initiatives in Interwar Poland]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2018. 419 pages.**

Whether the result of careful planning or a lucky coincidence, the timing of *Dziecko, rodzina i pleć w amerykańskich inicjatywach humanitarnych i filantropijnych w II Rzeczypospolitej* by Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska couldn't have been better. In 2018, when the monograph entered the Polish academic market, the whole world celebrated the centennial of the end of WWI, and Poland commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of regaining independence after 123 years of political nonexistence on the political map of Europe. Moreover, the year 2019 marks another important centenary: the establishment of U.S.-Polish diplomatic relations. As it happens, it is exactly those events of 1918 and 1919 that constitute the starting point of the engaging history of American humanitarian and philanthropic activities in restored Poland throughout the interwar period 1918-1939 told by the Author in her voluminous monograph. She situates the motivation behind the American humanitarian presence in Poland/Europe after WWI at the intersection of US geo-political interests and the strong ideological impulse of American Progressivism. The book approaches the history of the American aid from the perspective signaled by the title concepts: the child, the family, and gender. The argument is organized around four groups of principal Polish welfare recipients in the considered period identified by the American humanitarians as primarily important in the reconstruction of the war-devastated Polish society: deprived children, dysfunctional families, women in their maternal role, and male youth. Kuźma-Markowska formulates several research questions concerning the four selected areas and, by answering them, attempts a comprehensive historical panorama of American humanitarian operations in interwar Poland, a synthesis much needed when the relevant Polish and American historiography is still fragmentary and dispersed.

The study may be appreciated at two main levels. The enthusiasts of traditional historiographic narratives will value ample factual information about the American political and philosophical motives behind the humanitarian activity in post-war Europe; the main American philanthropic organizations operating in interwar Poland; their Polish institutional partners and successors; biographical references to the main American and Polish activists; careful attention to the chronology of various humanitarian endeavors; geographical sketches of American welfare provisions in Poland, and the inclusion of interesting—often previously unknown—human and financial statistics of the American relief ventures. While some of this factual information is drawn from secondary sources, Polish and American, the Author's remarkable effort to retrieve new evidence from a wide range of primary archival materials must be fully acknowledged.

Although praiseworthy, the conventional methodological apparatus is not the main strength of the monograph, but its combination with the cultural studies critical paradigm of sex-gender/race-ethnicity/class. Due to this methodological

decision, Kuźma-Markowska presented a unique socio-cultural history of prolonged contact between two geographically distant as well as materially, mentally and politically different cultures happening not only among political and intellectual elites but—most importantly—amid the common people of restored Poland. It is a story of a cultural clash between American ethnocentrism, rationalism, progressivism and trust in scientific philanthropy represented by the US relief organizations on the one hand, and the disintegrated, materially devastated and physically undermined Polish nation struggling with poverty, massive illiteracy and major economic difficulties on the other. But it is also a story of ordinary Americans, their generosity, charitable disposition, sense of moral responsibility, and of dozens of volunteers ready to travel overseas and work hard helping a distant unfamiliar nation in its predicament, often in the atmosphere of reluctance and distrust.

Detailed aspects of the culture contact are explored across five main book chapters. Chapter 1 presents and critically discusses three dominant aspects of Poland's post-war situation generated in America by the humanitarian activists via mass-circulation press and eye-witness reports: pervasive rural and urban homelessness, maternal poverty, and the ordeal of child war survivors. Kuźma-Markowska confronts the emotionally charged sensationalized presentations, evocative illustrations, and photographs with historical facts and points to the reasons of their bias and selectivity: diagnosing the plight of Polish peasants and urban underclass by middle-class professional American philanthropists; faulty generalization about the entire country on the basis of the deprived Eastern borderlands, and overextending Poland's post-war humanitarian crisis well into the 1920s. Chapter 2 draws a complex picture of "rescuing" Polish children by American philanthropic organizations characterized by the financial and operational priority of nutrition and physical rehabilitation, the American scientific dietary principles confronted with Polish reality, and the logistics of food preparation and serving, among other factors. An important fact highlighted in this section is ethnic segregation of children's aid adopted by the American Relief Organization based on the recognized Jewish-Christian polarization of Polish society. The ethnic division of American philanthropy was deepened by the parallel operation of the Jewish Distribution Committee, an American organization offering aid to Jewish populations in central and eastern Europe. Although the Author blames the adopted system for intensifying ethnic frictions and assimilation problems in the multiethnic interbellum Poland, she acknowledges its practical effectiveness in reaching the most destitute children of both groups, especially in the immediate post-war period.

The restoration of broken and dysfunctional Polish families as the American philanthropic strategy of helping war orphans makes the content of chapter 3. The discussed solutions such as support for orphanages, propagation of financial and legal adoptions by American citizens, creation of foster families in Poland, facilitating family reunifications and reintegration of children across the Atlantic leaves one in awe at their scope and variety as well as at the personal involvement and goodwill they required. Kuźma-Markowska points to the difficulties of making them more effective, such as the effort of recruiting adoptive parents in the US, the cost of transatlantic transportation, strict American immigration laws, lack of sufficient public and church facilities for orphanages and day-care centers in many areas. She also stresses the

crucial importance of American—philanthropy for Jewish orphans systematically neglected by the regional state administrations in favor of Christian children.

Chapter 4, devoted to the central role of women in the child-centered American humanitarian projects, constitutes a fine example of women's history closely linked with the feminist concerns with women's family role models, particularly maternal, paid employment and domestic labor, and the intersection of the public and private life. Polish women were not primary targets of the American philanthropic institutions; nevertheless, the recognized importance of their maternal and child caring functions got them involved in many rescue programs dedicated to the youngest generation. While the many presented forms and problems of working with destitute Polish pregnant and newly delivered women and young mothers constitute a good read, the chapter's most engaging aspect is the simultaneous elucidation of the profound cultural disparities between the traditional Polish and new medicalized American views on pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, infant care, and hygiene. Many of the American interventions were certainly good and much needed. Yet reading about Polish women's reluctance towards the institutional male-supervised encroachments on their traditional maternal sphere (considered by Kuźma-Markowska as an instance of Foucauldian biopolitics), one cannot avoid a reflection on how many of the once discouraged non-scientific practices of midwife-assisted home childbirth, non-medical pain relief, and breastfeeding on demand have recently been reclaimed by obstetrical and nursing sciences. Another impression left by the section on working women is that, albeit under necessity, many Polish lower-class widowed and abandoned women paradoxically came much closer to today's norm of the working mother and the female family breadwinner than the model American housewives in patriarchal middle-class families.

The final chapter deals with the American attempts at the physical and moral regeneration of Polish male adolescents and young men undertaken by YMCA and its Polish continuator. As in the preceding chapters, Kuźma-Markowska links the chronological account of the implementation of the YMCA programs and construction of facilities with parallel reflection of how they were meant to propagate the contemporary Anglo-American middle-class ideal of the muscular Christian gentleman characterized by manliness, discipline, self-control, and the moral and physical beauty of athleticism. She demonstrates how in many respects the YMCA goals were being transformed by the Polish conditions and priorities. For instance, strong interest of young Polish males in team and combat sports stemmed from remodeling the ideal of the muscular gentleman to that of a muscular soldier. Moreover, the Catholic and single-sex identity of Polish YMCA closed its centers to Jewish males and all young women. YMCA also failed to replicate its mass character in Poland, and became politicized in the Eastern borderlands by its involvement in the resistance to Russian communism and Polonization of culturally "savage" ethnic minorities.

One may have a few minor regrets concerning the monograph. One, applying to most Polish history books, is the lack of a truly useful back-of-the-book index with thematic and geographical entries, not sufficiently compensated for by the provided index of names. Another is the absence of at least one general map of interbellum Poland visualizing the spatial network of the American relief centers. The book could

also have been richer in photographic reproductions, particularly when discussed in the text (341, 352). For an author evidently well acquainted with Polish, Ukrainian, Belarussian, and American archives, Kuźma-Markowska offers a rather modest indication of the needs and possibilities of further research on American philanthropy, suggesting instead a closer look at the penetration of American popular culture in contemporary Poland. Yet these omissions do not diminish the overall high value of this well-conceived monograph based on rich primary sources. Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska paid due tribute to the generous and tireless efforts of many American institutions and individuals who helped the most vulnerable members of Polish society in the time of greatest need. She met the challenge of doing humanitarian history described by Yves Denéchère as the necessity of combining “social history, political history, history of international relations, but also cultural history and history of mentalities” (6). She achieved it by intertwining political, economic, class, ethnic, and gender reasoning. She made a valuable contribution to the dynamically developing studies on modern international humanitarianism. Hers is also a timely and valuable historiographic response to the current interest in the American humanitarian activities as a form of pursuing specific political objectives by the US governments and the heralded decline of principled humanitarianism.

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**Nikki Skillman. *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016. 352 pages.**

Many know that love, in its early stage, releases neurotransmitters identical with those released by regular addictive drugs. Most others suspect it, without knowing exactly or even roughly how it works. Regular craving for new love will not get us into an addiction recovery center, although, from the biological point of view, it is unclear exactly why it won't. Love is missed in the same way as a shot of opium. The materialism of the mind sciences is inherent in so much of the present discourse. Although it doesn't exactly occupy our mind, it structures our intuitive understanding of our condition and our moods.

Nikki Skillman, currently an Assistant Professor of English at Indiana University Bloomington, had quite a brilliant idea to explore how the biological, physiological, and neuroscientific descriptions of the mind—accounts of the machinery of reason, emotion, grief, memory, love—have impacted the lyrical poetry whose very domain has been traditionally these emotions. While one would expect poets to resist the notion of mind thoroughly embodied, Skillman finds them in fact

“exhibit[ing] a common faith in mechanistic interpretations of mind” (4). They share in the philosophical consensus that the mind is in fact the brain. Postwar American poets, she says, are, on the whole, “deferential witnesses to the explanatory power of science” (4). At the same time, the critic shows postmodern poets to insist on human mystery regardless, and to variously to this biologization of human life.

The critic finds this paradigm dominating, for instance, the work of Robert Lowell. First, Skillman demonstrates how the mechanistic metaphors for the mind are central to Lowell’s high confessional mode. Her example is, not surprisingly, “The Neo-Classical Urn” from *For the Union Dead* (1964), a poem which is greatly illustrative of the biologist understanding of the mind; it exemplifies “verse not as an inspired vehicle of the immaterial soul but as a hollow counterpart to the inanimate parts that somehow anchor human wholes” (51). To quote her quote from Lowell’s famous lyric,

I rub my head and find a turtle shell  
stuck on a pole,  
each hair electrical  
with charges, and the juice alive  
with ferment. Bubbles drive  
the motor, always purposeful... (51)

Paradoxically, seen as classically confessional, this poem puts into question the very epistemological grounds of the confessional mode. But Lowell’s most dramatic and radical reaction to the growing domination of the biologist paradigm came a few years afterwards. In 1967 he was put on lithium which suspended the endless circles of mania and depression that led to his annual hospitalizations between 1957 and 1966. Robert Giroux rather famously recalled how Lowell underwent a crisis when told that his constant swaying between mania and depression could be fixed simply with a little bit of lithium carbonate taken in pills. In fact, he and his loved ones would have been spared so much of suffering, had the drug been discovered earlier. “It’s terrible,” he reportedly told Giroux, “to think that all I’ve suffered, and all the suffering I’ve caused, might have arisen from the lack of a little salt in my brain” (60). The lithium led him to radically renew his writing in his experimental volumes *Notebook 1967–68* (1969) and *Notebook* (1970). In Skillman’s view, those two volumes advance “a form that depicts the chaos of inner life as an expression of chemical accident” (50). She then offers a dramatic and persuasive account of how, after he had a relapse, he lost confidence both in the cure and in his poetic mission.

Robert Creeley, too, in his own way, quickly moved to poetry that subscribed to the biological materialism dominating our understanding of the mind. In his case, the change came with his recreational use of LSD in the early 1960s. In the 1950s, he still worked under the assumption there is an unbridgeable duality between the body and the mind, something that, as he said in an interview, made poetry writing feel like an “awful” “torque” (89). His volume *For Love: Poems 1950–1960* (1962), Skillman writes, was “cripplingly” self-conscious and systematically denigrating the body. The year 1963, however, marks a significant transition to poetry showing the mind to consist of progressing-through-time motions of consciousness determined by

physiological moods and the contingencies of language. His poem “I Keep to Myself Such Measures...” (1963) still seems to arise from a unified “I” but is no longer a torque of conflict of the mind and the body. It represents a far stabler motion of thought through time. Creeley’s poetry, in the wake of William Carlos Williams, sustainedly arose from his modern understanding of the mind; it registers the process of thinking as unfolding in real time, biologically condition and also guided by string of words on the page (101).

Skillman then includes analogous sketches on the neurologist discourse as underlying A. R. Ammons’s poetic thought, James Merrill’s understanding of memory and its failures, and John Ashbery’s account of attention. It seems that none of the different modes of mental life has escaped physiological descriptions or framing in the important American poetry of the last 70 years.

Jorie Graham, too, has been deeply involved in the physiologist paradigm in the understanding of the human mind. Skillman traces this interest to her friendship with Antonio Damasio, the chair of the neurology department at the University of Iowa in 1990s. Still, Graham has been concerned that the biological determinism inherent in the paradigm uselessly undermines our appreciation of social and interpersonal responsibilities (220). In this best chapter of her book, Skillman shows Graham’s work as stemming from her conviction that poetry should both avoid the old illusions and yet fulfill its special mission and obligation to balance off biological cognitivism with the reassertion of “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts” (207). She both asserts the physiologist mode and opposes it. In the late 1980s and 1990s Graham begins to use underlined blank spaces. Combined with mathematical variables, they reaffirm gaps and mysteries in human vision and understanding. Skillman argues that Graham’s poetry identifies blind spots of human empiricism. In her poem “Subjectivity,” for instance, from her volume *Materialism* (1996), a dead monarch butterfly, an archetypal symbol of the mind, is a subject of intense inquiry. Closely scrutinized by the speaker, its wholeness eludes description; inserted among the symbolic pages of a book, it would become flat:

as if it were still too plural, too  
shade-giving, where the mind needs it  
so flat (218)

After five rich chapters discussing individual poets, Skillman’s inquiry accelerates toward the end. In “Conclusion,” subtitled “Anti-Lyric in the Age of the Brain,” she more cursorily but effectively reviews a number of more recent poetic projects—like that by Tan Lin (b. 1957), Juliana Spahr (b. 1966), David Buuck, Haryette Mullen (b. 1953), and Christian Bök (b. 1966)—as seeking to deconstruct human subjectivity, demystify the deep poetic self and to accommodate the “intentionless, emotionless quanta of anatomical being” into their sense being alive (240). Their aims, she argues, are usually contradictory and paradoxical. Charting thoroughly embodied cognition as they do, they also—in Skillman’s own words—“assert the perseverance of hobgoblin immaterialities (creativity, originality, emotion, voice)” (241). Her one engaging example is *An Army of Lovers* (2013) by Juliana Spahr and David Buuck, an anti-lyric prose narrative exploring the impasse which two characters, the two

fictionalized authors, Demented Panda and Koki, have found themselves in. The two collaborating poets are disgusted with the egotism of the traditional lyric and yet would like to find a mode which would, within a larger anti-lyric skepticism, allow them to preserve emotional agency (253-54).

Nikki Skillman wrote an important and insightful book. Filled with effective readings, lucidly argued, and exuberantly written, it's now the most important single book-length analysis of this key aspect of contemporary lyric. Importantly, her approach helps bridge a deep divide between confessional poetry and the more language-centered poetic modes.

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**Kacper Bartczak, ed. *Poeci Szkoły Nowojorskiej* [The Poets of the New York School]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2018. 364 pages.**

In his editorial introduction to a recent volume in the series *Mistrzowie Literatury Amerykańskiej* (*Masters of American Literature*), Kacper Bartczak ponders what the New York School of poetry was and what it is now, thus placing his critical discussion in a historical context and unveiling recurrent classification problems. Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, James Schuyler, Barbara Guest, and Kenneth Koch—whose work is explored in this book—never identified as members of the New York School, never expressed a desire for artistic affiliation, and never sketched any group manifesto. As Ashbery elucidated, “this label was foisted upon us by a man named John Bernard Myers, who ran the Tibor de Nagy Gallery.... I don't think we were ever a school.... We were a bunch of poets who happened to know each other; we would get together and read our poems to each other and sometimes we would write collaborations” (*The Paris Review Interviews* 182).

The book edited by Kacper Bartczak constitutes an important and nuanced response to those classification dilemmas. Unlike David Lehman, who coined the term “the last avant-garde” to argue that the New York School poets (except Guest whom he excluded from his study) were “the last authentic avant-garde movement that we had in American poetry” (1), the authors of the essays collected in this volume avoid grandiose statements about the role of this casually formed “school” in the history of North American avant-gardes. Instead of atomizing distinctive features of New York School poetics, they highlight the overlapping aesthetic impulses, tendencies, and interests that bring this “bunch of poets who happened to know each other” together. In the present volume, the New York School emerges as an ephemeral “event,” propelled by artistic encounters and exchanges between Schuyler, O'Hara, Ashbery, Koch, and Guest. Importantly, Bartczak argues that what consolidates the group is a shared attempt at “integrating the poem with a real, material-psychological and context-based event.” This integrative effort also “generates the event itself, in a way both surprising and unpredictable for its participants” (9). Paradoxically, however, such organic welding

can be engendered, as Bartczak clarifies, “only through the artificiality of form.”<sup>1</sup> In that regard, the New York School could be considered a “materialization of myriad styles, techniques, and methods, which emerged from a particular spatiotemporal location, generating experimental energy that is still resonating today, both in the US and Poland” (9).

The emphasis on the dynamics of creative process, coupled with a lack of programmatic ideas, is another important point of convergence, as the critic Brian Reed and the contributors to this volume demonstrate (Bartczak 14). Reading the New York School poets *through* one another gives us a better insight into the intricate and shifting life-poetry interrelations, which cannot be easily pinned down and encapsulated in a clear-cut definition. As Geoff Ward suggests in his review of Barbara Guest’s *If So, Tell Me*, we should look at the “New York School” as a “provisional exercise in cognitive mapping rather than a fixed, historical or regional reality.” The present book gathers essays from scholars, critics, and poets, who embark on such exercise in literary cartography. By bringing O’Hara, Ashbery, Koch, Schuyler, and Guest into a shared conversation, they unfold a map that enables the reader to navigate his/her experience of the New York School as an event rather than ossified and insular category.

This powerful effect has been achieved also thanks to the skillful arrangement of the chapters. The dynamism of the New York School is transposed into the structure of the book, loosely divided into four thematic fields: “Plasticity, Ekphrasis, Intermediality,” “The Constructions of Subjectivity,” “Technique and Formal Consistency,” and “Influence.” The chapters grouped in each section enter into a polyphonous and lively dialogue, which is quite rare in multi-authored publications.

In the opening section, the authors situate their discussion of plasticity in the context of the New York School poets’ close collaborations with visual artists and their strong interests in painting, which ranged widely across Italian Mannerism, surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, action painting, and Fairfield Porter’s soft-focused realism. Marek Wilczyński looks at the genealogies of such intense interdisciplinary interactions, pointing out that O’Hara et al. were not the first New York cohort that established strong ties with painters. In the first half of the nineteenth century influential relationships were also formed between the Knickerbockers, among others groups, and Romantic painters who were part of the Hudson River School. The scholar makes connections between these two cohorts, identifying their shared impulse to shift towards the new—uniquely American—modes of expression. Wilczyński also argues that aesthetic philosophy of O’Hara, Ashbery and Schuyler was partly influenced by Emerson’s theorizing on the relation between nature and “the self.” In the subsequent chapter, Paulina Ambroży discusses the role of visual arts in Ashbery’s work, focusing on a famous ekphrastic poem “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (1975), inspired by Parmigianino’s painting. Through a close reading of the poem, the scholar demonstrates how the genre of self-portrait helps Ashbery problematize elaborate mechanisms of perception, the impossibility of self-representation, and the elusiveness of “the self.” Following Jean Luc Nancy, Ambroży argues that Ashbery’s self-portrait shows us that we can never approximate any “essence” of subjectivity, only the “relational

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of excerpts from *Poeci Szkoły Nowojorskiej* are my own.

multiplicity of the voices of the Other—the imaginary structure of possibilities, styles, languages, and language events that produce a sort of ‘noise’ that leads to what can be termed a ‘non-recognition’” (48).

Mikołaj Wiśniewski, on the other hand, illustrates how Fairfield Porter’s soft-focused realism is reflected in James Schuyler’s poetic technique, including his sensuous rendering of the quotidian. Tracing Schuyler’s transition from diaristic prose to prose poetry, Wiśniewski asserts that what might seem a stylistic awkwardness or nonchalance on the part of the poet, is, in fact, a deliberately employed strategy. What emerges underneath a seemingly chaotic surface is a well-thought-out pattern, whose painterly consistency is achieved through the recurrence of intricately and subtly connected motives (95-96). Dense sensuousness is also discussed in the last chapter in the section, only this in time with regard to Barbara Guest’s experimental verse. Alicja Piechucka’s reading of Guest’s early poem titled “Parachutes, My Love, Could Carry Us Higher” also includes a commentary on its Polish translation by Tadeusz Rybowski. The translator’s counterintuitive use of the gender-related verb forms prompts the scholar to ponder the functions of the gendered “I” in Guest’s work in the context of both “poetics of indeterminacy” and surrealism, which—as the poet argued in her interview with Rachel Blau DuPlessis—“meant freedom, especially for a woman” (169-170).

Piechucka also briefly discusses the exclusion of Guest’s work from both university textbooks and major anthologies of North American poetry. It is noteworthy that Guest has been also omitted from a number of publications devoted exclusively to the New York School, including the 1970 *Anthology of New York Poets*, edited by Ron Padgett and David Shapiro; and David Lehman’s more recent *The Last Avant-Garde. The Making of the New York School of Poets*. In Poland, as Piechucka documents, Guest’s oeuvre still remains largely unrecognized. *Poeci Szkoły Nowjorskiej*, which includes one essay on this innovative poet, constitutes an important contribution to the current state of research. It is regrettable, however, that more critical work on Guest’s experimental technique, minimalism, or the sonic quality of her verse, has not been included, especially since the volume comprises six articles on Ashbery, whose work has been much better recognized in Poland. Bringing Guest into a shared conversation with fellow New York School poets might have been a yet another asset of this book.

The second section, which masterfully elaborates O’Hara’s and Ashbery’s complex negotiations of subjectivity, opens with Marjorie Perloff’s essay on O’Hara’s personism, translated by Dominika Bernacka. Perloff demonstrates how the poet—through his performative straightforwardness—escapes Eliot’s impersonal imperative, construing in his verse new forms of intimacy and affectivity, which cannot be reduced to confession. The essay sets the scene for subsequent discussions of “expression,” the “I” of the poem, and the poetic self-creation. Jacek Gutorow claims that Ashbery is, “in a fact, a Romantic poet” (141). Nevertheless, such reading requires, as the scholar argues, a much more nuanced definition of Romantic consciousness, which would move beyond its popular understanding as a “more developed form of sentimentalism, characterized by a direct expression of feelings” (142). Gutorow not only reminds us about the importance of irony, parody, denial, and rhetorical distance in Romantic philosophy, but also draws our attention to the Romantic conviction about the

“dialectical, ergo processual and equivocal, dimension of both consciousness and reality,” which is also expressed in Ashbery’s works (143).

Kacper Bartczak’s essay constitutes another intervention into habitual modes of thinking subjectivity and poetic expression. Bartczak argues that Ashbery’s poetics overcomes a text/life binary, offering us a new perspective on the elusive interrelations between the text and affective individual experience of its author. Drawing on Alexander Nehamas’s idea of aesthetic self-creation, the scholar rethinks the role of the autobiographical in Ashbery’s work away from both the confessional aesthetics of self-expression and the idea of “I” as purely textual. The emerging subject-positions in Ashbery’s work are not, as Bartczak illustrates, prior to the poem, but emerge simultaneously with the text. This section closes with the chapter on O’Hara authored by Tadeusz Pióro and translated by Jakub Statnik. Unlike many other critical works that emphasize vitality of the subject in O’Hara’s poetry, Pióro’s essay accentuates the problem of existential boredom and angst. Frenetic movement and intensity manifested in O’Hara’s poetry might be read as defense mechanisms against the recurring moments of spleen.

The third section further elaborates poetic technique and form, already problematized in the previous chapters, but from a different vantage point. Both Paweł Marcinkiewicz and Anna Warso ponder the intricacies of Ashbery’s evolving poetics, giving the reader an insight into fascinating aesthetic shifts and transpositions. Marcinkiewicz argues that in his 2015 collection *Breezeway*, Ashbery returns to those energy sources that gave impetus to the New York School early poetry—the language play and immersion in the quotidian. Interestingly, the scholar brings the title poem into Polish as “Bryzo, wiej,” thus emphasizing the phonetic, visual and associative dimension of the original. This experimental translation is also meant to illustrate that Ashbery’s recent collection not only constitutes an *open passage* connecting the past and the present, but also embodies writing as *floating away* from the literary canon (226). An instance of concrete poetry, *Breezeway* can be read as a formal variation on Pound’s ideogram-inspired verse, a variation which nevertheless lacks underlying consistency and “slips into a pure play with indeterminacy”—a bricolage of quotes and intertextual references that do not hold together or illuminate one another (232). Anna Warso, in contrast, brings into focus Ashbery’s second poetry collection, *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962), which provoked heated debate among critics. While Harold Bloom was outraged by its disjunctiveness, the “Language” poets considered it of great significance, both aesthetically and politically (243). Like the latter, Warso views *The Tennis Court Oath* as a pioneering work, in which Ashbery developed radically experimental techniques that he would employ in his later work. The poems collected in this volume, similarly to those from *Breezeway*, follow the logic of montage, with its elements working as linguistic “objets trouvés,” as Marcinkiewicz put it (221). However, while parts of the hypertextual bricolage in *Breezeway* cannot be, as Marcinkiewicz convincingly argues, pieced together, Warso demonstrates that in *The Tennis Court Oath* Ashbery creates a “hospitable space” that welcomes a participatory reading, thus opening up the possibility of collective sense-making.

In the first section a lot has been said about the New York School poets’ intense interactions with painters, and their strong interest in visual arts. In the closing chapter

of the third section, Magdalena Szuster reminds us about their fascination with drama, thus contributing to a more comprehensive mapping of the group's positioning across different genres. Looking at Kenneth Koch's 1988 *One Thousand Avant-Garde Plays*, Szuster claims that his work might be considered an alternative to both mainstream and "postmodernist avant-garde" theatre (257). The scholar defines Koch's style as eclectic since it draws on a number of diverse traditions—occidental, oriental, surrealist, futurist, or even gospel (267). His reliance on a wide array of techniques, coupled with a consistent refusal to engage in any forms of political agitation, makes his work resistant to categorization. Szuster also asserts that although Koch's technique is montage-like, it exhibits internal consistency. As in the case of Schuyler's poetry, the seemingly unrelated parts form an underlying intricate pattern (266).

The closing section discusses the impact of the New York School of poetry on both US and Polish poets. A comprehensive and much needed perspective provided in this part significantly contributes to comparative literary studies. In his essay on LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Jerzy Kamionowski problematizes an intimate relationship between aesthetics and politics, demonstrating how O'Hara's personism, among other New York School techniques, shaped Baraka's poetics. The scholar's understanding of personism differs, however, from that offered by Marjorie Perloff. While Perloff conceives of O'Hara's apparently "straightforward" poetic performance as a non-confessional construct, Kamionowski reads it as a "non-masked personal presence," which might be considered a response to the "depersonalization" of poetry favored by the New Critics (283). The author argues that the New York School aesthetics became partly integrated into Baraka's conceptualization of "Black Aesthetics." At the same time, however, Baraka refused to separate his art from the pressing problems of racial discrimination, or to limit his radicalism to formal experimentation. This reminds us about the importance of the poet's broadly understood location and the impact it has on their approach towards newness and social-commitment in literature.

The two subsequent chapters elaborate the influence that O'Hara and Ashbery exerted on Polish contemporary poetry. Joanna Orska scrutinizes the "translation-transit game" between Ashbery and one of the major contemporary Polish poets—Andrzej Sosnowski (309). The scholar claims that a considerable interest in narrative poetic forms, or the so called *poet's prose*, observed in Poland in the 1990s was triggered by the translations of both New York School and modernist poetry (307). In her meticulous analysis, Orska demonstrates how Sosnowski's translations of Ashbery's *poet's prose*, affected—at many levels—his own writing, and renewed formally Polish prose. Krzysztof Siwczyk, on the other hand, examines how the critical reception of O'Hara's poems, translated by Piotr Sommer and collected in the volume *Twoja pojedynczość* (1986), shaped the understanding of his poetics. Siwczyk points out that literary critics at the time tended to reduce O'Hara's technique to a few slogans that comprised the idea of the poet's "authenticity" and "I see and describe" approach (331). Profiled in such a way, O'Hara was then deemed a major influencer, whose impact was identified in the works of the *brulion* generation writers like Marcin Świetlicki and Jacek Podsiadło, who became soon referred to as *o'harists*. Siwczyk claims that it was not until 2015, when more works by O'Hara were brought into Polish, that such oversimplified representations were started to be revised. The

recent translations enabled, as Siwczyk proves, new readings of O'Hara's poetics away from the prematurely ascribed labels. The critic brings together O'Hara and two contemporary Polish poets—Maciej Melecki and Marcin Sendecki—to rethink the meanings of “influence” and examine what their poetic languages share.

The volume closes with Przemysław Owczarek's critical-creative text, which might be regarded as an exercise in embodied reading-writing. The author is looking at O'Hara's poems while walking through the streets of Łódź—“an impoverished sister” of New York (337). The energy and rhythms of both cities—as well as those of O'Hara's verse—become transposed into Owczarek's text. The walk prompts the critic to ponder different aspects of “city habitats” as well as “textual habitats” of the New York School poet's work (343-344). “Close yet not to close reading” of the city-rooted poems intermingles with discussions of urban theory and references to O'Hara criticism. Multiple voices can be heard as the author is walking down Piotrkowska Street, arguing that O'Hara was, in fact, not a *flâneur*—a connoisseur of aesthetic pleasures, strolling around the city with no purpose or time limitations—but rather a “przemyskacz”—an autochthon who moves frenetically and “intuitively knows where he is going and why” (361).

In his essay, Jacek Gutorow invites us to “engage in an attentive and committed reading, which is directed at discovering in a text the living and ever-changing forms of experience and expression” (169). I would argue that all essays gathered in this volume constitute such an invitation and enable the reader to become a curator of his/her experience of the “ephemeral event” known as the New York School of poetry. What is more, each chapter addresses the questions that are still very much alive in the critical discussions around most recent US poetry and poetics. This includes life-text interrelations, different meanings of the political in art, or the problem of expression, experiment and subjectivity. Thus, the present book is a highly recommended read not only for those interested specifically in the New York School, but for anyone committed to a non-reductive reading of literature.

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**Tadeusz Pióro and Marek Paryż, eds. *Thomas Pynchon*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego. 2018, 256 pages.**

The significance of Thomas Pynchon for American post-WWII literature is undisputed, therefore, for the Polish reader, the volume edited by Tadeusz Pióro and Marek Paryż comes with much anticipation, as do the successive translations of Pynchon's novels. But as Tadeusz Pióro points out in his closing article, Pynchon takes time. This entails not only the long process of writing, which, as Pióro shows, often spans over a number of decades but also the time that is necessary for the translators to overcome the many challenges that the author throws at them. It is difficult to imagine a casual reader of Pynchon, someone who simply picks up one of his novels, reads through from the first sentence to last and puts it away never to return to it again. I would rather think of a Pynchon reader as of a connoisseur, someone who not only reads the novels themselves multiple times, but also engages in lengthy discussions with other Pynchon readers, explores the enormity of detail that characterizes the author's work, as someone who tries to understand the principles of advanced physics and information technology, who reads lengthy books on American and global political history to be able to tell real events from those that Pynchon invented for our painful amusement.<sup>1</sup> Marcin Rychter writes about the Internet communities devoted to studying and discussing his work, much in the spirit of Pynchon's fiction itself, ridden with a variety of closed societies and almost obsessed with technology.

My belief that there are almost no casual readers of Pynchon is confirmed by the authors of the chapters in this volume, not in the sense that they openly share this belief (although I suspect they might), but in the sense that in my eyes they are members of the community of Pynchon readers. It seems to me that any of the authors in the volume could have written their chapter on any of Pynchon's novels, and possibly the decision to assign the material to the respective scholars was taken by drawing cards. I am writing this half-seriously to emphasize the number of connections between the various novels (and not only) that the authors were able to make.

It is true that some themes, references to particular essays appear more than once in the volume, but we must keep in mind that the book, in spite of its logical and chronological order, is itself a collection of essays that can, if need be, read individually, not that, as I have suggested, this is a likely situation. When read as a whole, the book presents Pynchon as a methodical and consistent author, who was not, however, immune to significant change. The best example of this is the clear division between his early and his late work put forward by Zuzanna Ładyga. It is an important differentiation because it helps to free Pynchon from the label of the iconic postmodern writer. It is true that to many theorists of postmodernism, such as the often-quoted Brian McHale, Pynchon has provided a fertile ground for literary analysis, but with postmodernism's dawn two decades ago, the label hardly does him any favors. Such a liberating approach seems to a manifestation of an implicit credo of the entire series, which, it seems to me, is to battle intellectual sloth that haunts the age of fake news.

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<sup>1</sup> As we learn from Mikołaj Wiśniewski's article, a simple rule of plausibility does not do the job: in Pynchon's fiction the historical is often equally absurd as the fictional.

The introduction to the volume features a very decent biographical backdrop, which in the case of an author almost defined by his absence from public life,<sup>2</sup> is not easy to present. This is important because it draws our attention to the moral aspect of Pynchon's work, which can perhaps be tied to the reasons for his hiding. It seems that the moral dimension of contemporary literature has been relegated to a variety of minority discourses and feminist literature, whereas more "mainstream" authors have rarely been presented as moral thinkers in critical accounts. This aspect of Pynchon's writing is covered quite extensively in the book, I am happy to report. Tadeusz Pióro's introduction also signals two other themes that run through Pynchon's *oeuvre*, and both of them revolve around the ethos of the Enlightenment that saturates our natural-science-dominated world: our understanding of history and technology, and these are extensively developed upon in the successive essays.

In his analysis of Pynchon's debut novel *V*, Marek Paryż picks up the baton and shows how a set of beliefs formulated over two centuries ago still affects the logic of post-WWII America, and how the Enlightenment desire for certainty has given way to the emergence of totalitarian states on the global scale. In Paryż's view, Pynchon's taste for the irrational can be understood as a reaction to totalitarianism, which is a well-grounded argument, indeed. The scholar is quick to pick up on the sexuality in *V*, and by extent, also in Pynchon's later novels (especially *Gravity's Rainbow* is a case in point). From the very outset, sex for Pynchon is characterized by obsession and absurdity, both of which metonymically define the human condition. The article does an excellent job of explaining the ways in which Pynchon uses a variety of popular literary genres to means greater than exposing the grasp popular culture has over contemporary society. The argument showing how the form of the novel is instrumental to the exploration of its possible meanings reveals that from the very beginning we are dealing with a writer of great complexity and finesse, suggesting that the readers should always be on their toes lest we should jump to hasty conclusions or gross simplifications.

Jagoda Dolińska's chapter introduces to the readers of the volume the notion of entropy, a concept that resurfaces in almost every book-length analysis of Pynchon's prose, and references the very popular distinction between modernism and postmodernism that made Brian McHale a celebrity in the literary theory circles. What makes the essay truly noteworthy is her discussion of apophatic theology, as it sheds much light on the author's metaphysics. Metaphysics indeed seems to be a fruitful path to discuss Pynchon's discontent with the ethos of the Age of Reason. The aesthetics of chaos needs not to be grim, as it turns out, it can be almost cheerful, which is not to say that Dolińska omits the darker side of the human condition. Its duality is reflected well by a reference to the category of sublimity, discussed both in the most ancient and the most recent understanding. Perhaps I am splitting hairs at this stage, but I would be very interested to read what Dolińska would say about Burke's writing on the sublime, Burke being an early critic of the Enlightenment<sup>3</sup>.

Jan Balbierz continues the reflection on the relationship between science and mysticism in his essay on *Gravity's Rainbow* associating the West with the regime

2 In an episode of *The Simpsons* Pynchon was shown with a paper bag over his head.

3 Some Polish historians of philosophy classify Burke as an Enlightenment thinker, but most often he is rather seen as a transitory figure.

of science and the East with spirituality. This common connection is revived and re-validated by exploring the historical fracture in human learning that took place around the nineteenth century. The reference to Bakhtin seems almost necessary to be made in the context of Pynchon's best-known novel, an excellent manifestation of the carnivalesque, but also as Balbierz notices, a novel that "disintegrates novelistic patterns" (63). *Gravity's Rainbow* is perhaps nowadays the most quoted example of an encyclopedic narrative, but as the scholar points out, Pynchon's novel attains this status by standing in relation with prior encyclopedic narratives, such as those by Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes, Goethe, Melville, and Joyce.<sup>4</sup> The essay is also sensitive to the significance of human corporeality, a prominent theme in Pynchon's fiction, which in the context of *Gravity's Rainbow* is discussed in connection with Pavlov's psychological experimentation. The combination of hard science with questioned causal relationships produces a disturbing effect that permeates the atmosphere of Pynchon's famous work.

Arkadiusz Misztal's reading of *Gravity's Rainbow* expands Jan Balbierz's reflection on the novel's relationship with other crucial encyclopedic narratives by focusing on Melville's *Moby-Dick*. It is worth noting that Melville's *opus magnum* is not the most obvious of connections to be made, yet Misztal's position is well-grounded, especially by the way in which the scholar discusses the opening sentences of both novels. Looking at *Gravity's Rainbow* from the perspective of *Moby-Dick* allows us to appreciate the way in which Pynchon renegotiates the status of his own work. Misztal's careful discussion of the book's plot in connection to its formal structure would serve as an excellent introduction to the novel, should a new Polish edition be published. Those who are well-acquainted with *Gravity's Rainbow* will, without a doubt, appreciate Misztal's insight into the cinematic quality of Pynchon's narration. The argument stands firmly on two pillars: the author's unorthodox treatment of time and his taste for randomness. Historically, the development of the cinema is clearly connected with our perception of wars, the scholar observes, and so, indirectly, film has affected the way in which we write about the war.

Zofia Kolbuszewska contributes two articles to the volume, both outstanding, even in this collection, in terms of readability, to the extent that I would call them entertaining. The first one is devoted to *Slow Learner* and links Pynchon with Washington Irving's famous "Rip Van Winkle," a connection surprising, to say the least, but as it turns out, fully justified from the perspective Kolbuszewska offers, after all, in *Slow Learner* Pynchon experiences a literary encounter with himself twenty years junior. The scholar immediately exposes Pynchon's jester-like strategy of self-presentation and presents the author's attitude to his early short fiction as complex and ambiguous. From this standpoint, we can quickly recognize the significance of *Slow Learner* for understanding Pynchon's transformation over the many years of his literary career. The article provides a solid depiction of the historical backdrop for a more in-depth insight into the author's early output and helps to appreciate the prominence of certain themes in his later work, such as Pynchon's peculiar theory of garbage. The chapter beautifully comes together at the end and provides a smooth transition into Kolbuszewska's reading of *Vineland*.

<sup>4</sup> Significant mentions of the last two are made in other places of the volume as well.

The long-anticipated novel, as the scholar observes, was met with “a benevolent disappointment” (115) and, as it is implied, the initial reception was perhaps somewhat hasty. Kolbuszewska explores the possible reasons for this state of affairs as she consistently shows the unobvious qualities of the novel. The category of cryptomimesis, the focal point of the article, opens up the discussion of *Vineland* in a variety of directions: morality, history, aesthetics of the media, all of the above being consistent with other articles in the volume. Kolbuszewska also studies the novel in the context of nostalgia, both understood traditionally, and in its revised version, which suits well Pynchon’s description of contemporary America.

Mikołaj Wiśniewski opens his article on *Mason & Dixon* with a reference to Captain John Smith, whose colorful, but to a large extent, fictional depiction of historical events well reflects the atmosphere of Pynchon’s novel. History, even if recorded by an eye-witness, as it is made apparent, has a limited claim on the truth in the Enlightenment understanding of the word, and it is indeed the looming ghost of Enlightenment thinking that the writer seeks to exorcize in *Mason & Dixon*. As many articles in the volume show, a careful study of the historical context is instrumental when reading Pynchon, and nowhere is it more evident than in the case of this novel. Wiśniewski clearly shows that the most outlandish historical details in the novel can prove to be historically accurate, but they are often concealed amongst the author’s amusing confabulations. Wiśniewski does a good job of exposing *Mason & Dixon*’s moral center of gravity. The birth of tourism is depicted in relation to colonial cruelty, consumer culture is built on suffering, all in the spirit of a failed understanding of progress. Here too we have a reference to nostalgia, which precedes the question of whether Pynchon is escapist or ironic in regards to the fantastic world he has created. It is very likely, it seems to me, that the writer is ironic in the most subversive of ways, and in this sense, Wiśniewski is right to expose the critical function of Pynchon’s fiction.

Throughout the volume, as I have suggested, we develop a sense of dynamics that characterizes Pynchon’s *oeuvre* as a whole, and Marcin Rychter’s essay on *Against the Day* only reinforces this impression; after all, we are speaking about the author’s first novel of the new millennium. It is quite natural, therefore, that Rychter begins his argument by referring to the network structure of the narrative, a structure which immediately brings to mind the developments in information technology. Just like Mikołaj Wiśniewski, Marcin Rychter is sensitive to the peculiar interpenetration of temporal planes in Pynchon’s work, and here it is conceptually linked to the impact that the findings of quantum mechanics had on the collective metaphysics of the turn of the centuries. The possibility of parallel universes validated by scientific research way beyond the comprehension of a common consumer of culture has contributed to filling the religious void that opened up sometime towards the nineteenth century. The span of roughly one hundred years is where Pynchon’s novel dwells as it moves back and forth to examine what is often referred to as The American Century. Reading *Against the Day* from a Dionysian perspective puts forward the idea of a collective permanent intoxication, which brilliantly captures the quirky logic of this, and many other novels by Thomas Pynchon. The Apollonian sense of order, which since the 1800s has been reduced to a fig leaf for the post-capitalist West, gives way to intellectual frivolity.

Rychter is quite specific about the fact that Pynchon is not a nihilist, on the contrary, the scholar makes a strong case for the presence of Christian thinking in his prose, and even his use of the typically postmodernist metafictional devices could be tied to moral ends. Living in the digital age we have learned that our hopes for a free and innocent exchange of information have been childishly naïve and we have found ourselves bound between the freedom and criminality of the Dark Web, and the relatively safe oppression of the social media. The dichotomy of dangerous freedom and safe oppression can also be extended to the political plane, the problem of terrorism, to be precise, which in the novel is introduced by an allusion to 9/11, by many seen as the symbolic beginning of the twenty-first century. On the one hand, one is tempted to suspect that Pynchon's anti-establishment sympathies would make him side with the terrorists, but as Rychter points out, it is clearly not the case, for the author, an acute political mind fully realizes that terrorism actually contributes to the enforcement of oppressive authority. In this light, the introduced elements of Christian morality come in handy, but we must keep in mind that Pynchon is always far from being a typical moralist.

Zuzanna Ładyga's article is an unobvious continuation of Marcin Rychter's reading of *Against the Day*. Her analysis of *Inherent Vice* daringly takes on some of the negative reviews of Pynchon's 2009 novel to elaborate on the transformation the author's body of work underwent as a consequence of the gradual dawn of postmodernism. Ładyga sees the novel as the author's critical self-reflection, which helps to understand his departure from some of his trademark features. It is not a sign of Pynchon losing his touch, but rather a hint regarding his pursuit of other goals. Reading *Inherent Vice* with certain expectations formed by the merits of his earlier prose is a doomed enterprise, for it is set on a foundation of intellectual complacency, which a writer like Pynchon simply cannot tolerate. *Inherent Vice* turns out to be an interesting move on the author's part, and his direction seems to have much in common with the likes of David Foster Wallace, who himself was heavily influenced by Pynchon's early work.

Alicja Piechucka's chapter also seems to carry a distant echo of Wallace, as it brings together themes of entertainment and boredom, two seminal topics of Wallace's great novels, *Infinite Jest* and *The Pale King*, respectively. The focus here is on the female perspective, an interesting arch between *Bleeding Edge* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. A feminist take on Pynchon's work seems rather fresh, and at the same time obviously appropriate, after all, Oedipa Maas is one of the most recognizable characters in American postmodern prose. Piechucka presents Pynchon as a man quite familiar with the popular culture marketed for women, fashion and accessories, all of which are neatly inscribed in a discussion of the recent developments in the entertainment business. The play of contradictions consistently executed by Pynchon brings to mind associations with the superhero culture (an attractive woman with a seemingly boring job turns out to lead a life of danger and adventure, much like Clark Kent, taking off his nerdy glasses to rescue humanity). Piechucka is easily able to make the connection between chic-lit and consumerism, in the meantime discussing such interesting topics as the relationship between gender and politics (along the lines of the two major political parties in the United States), and the link between womanhood and 9/11. It is especially worthwhile to reflect on the role of the family in the context

of the fallen Twin Towers, the scholar demonstrates. Piechucka finishes her argument comparing Pynchon's image of America at the beginning of the twenty-first century with F. Scott Fitzgerald's America from a hundred years prior, again encouraging the discussion of what The American Century was like.

The final two articles in the collection look back on the entirety of Pynchon's literary output from two different, but not disconnected perspectives. Paweł Stachura's pondering of the encyclopedic quality in Pynchon's novels opens the author's work for fresh interpretative possibilities and sheds new light on the reflections that have been developing throughout the volume. Stachura clearly opposes flattened, simplistic approaches to an iconic author, a frequent problem with literati of such a status. A link to Derrida which leads through Joyce's *Ulysses* is convincing especially that Pynchon, as the scholar shows, processes and even parodies Derrida's work. An inquiry into the way postmodern writers have subverted the relationship between literature and its theory seems almost essential when writing about someone like Thomas Pynchon. Multiple references to the ancient tradition and classical devices of philology depict the author as a literary erudite, which helps to appreciate the depth and complexity of his prose.

The final essay in the collection studies the way in which Pynchon constructs his storylines. By making yet another link with Melville's *opus magnum*, Tadeusz Pióro is able to display an unobvious narrative strategy that Pynchon often resorts to: diminishing narrative tension. Such a procedure, in the scholar's eyes, serves an intricate purpose, it helps the author avoid the cynicism attributed at times to late-postmodern writers. This argument ties in well with the point Alicja Piechucka made earlier on; Pynchon appears to reach far beyond the literary tradition that made him its icon. It is true that a narrow reading of Pynchon's most famous novel could easily lead to the conclusion that *Gravity's Rainbow* ends in a cynical way, but a careful study of the narrative techniques employed points to the contrary. By deconstructing what we know as a happy ending, Tadeusz Pióro shows, Pynchon reveals disguised levels of irony throughout the novel. *Gravity's Rainbow* ends with what the scholar calls a "simulacrum of a moral" (255), which together with the formal complexity and amount of detail is impossible to trivialize. It appears, therefore, that Pynchon has found a way out of the impasse that brought postmodernism to its end, even before that end came to be.

The volume as a whole has much to offer to the Pynchon aficionado. It presents us with a richness of interpretative possibilities while still revolving around some of the main themes in Pynchon studies. It helps to understand the significant transformations the author's body of work underwent outlining a possible trajectory of his future novels, should they ever see print. Considering that Thomas Pynchon was born in 1937, the volume might, though I heartily hope it will not, cover the entirety of his *oeuvre*. From the thirteen essays on 256 pages, the writer emerges as an eternal literary rebel and avant-gardist, constantly eager to push his prose to its limits taking on formal, theoretical and philosophical restrictions. The recently departed Philip Roth would habitually express the opinion that the novel as a form of cultural expression is finished, Don DeLillo in his *Mao II* has voiced a view that in this day and age, the novelist will be replaced by the terrorist in the business of shaping our cultural

awareness, whereas Pynchon has continued, and hopefully continues, to relentlessly fight in its defense.

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**Francesca De Lucia. *Italian American Cultural Fictions: From Diaspora to Globalization*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2017. 180 pages.**

In the introduction to his *Buried Caesars*, Robert Viscusi maintains that one of the biggest problems for Italian Americans has been and continues to be Italy itself. According to Viscusi, Italy's cultural and economic policy has relied heavily on diaspora communities to promote the penetration of goods and the exposure of the national heritage in the US. In return, descendants of Italian immigrants have received very little recognition. This neglect applies also to the academy, where Italian-American studies, despite of having attracted a small but devoted following, are still absent from major scholarly conversation. It is therefore important to register a new addition to the still meagre canon of works on Italian Americans authored by scholars from the fatherland. Francesca De Lucia, with her *Italian American Cultural Fictions*, follows in the footsteps of, among others, Martino Marazzi, Marcella Bencivenni and Simone Cinotto, who are contributing in spreading Italian-American studies in Italy.

*Italian American Cultural Fictions* is very ambitious in scope, aiming to provide a survey on Italian-American cultural production mainly, but not exclusively, in literature, from the "classic age" of the first part of the twentieth century to the present. De Lucia's intent, however, is not to give a detailed chronicle of a century of cultural production, but in particular to focus her account on the transition from an earlier mode of representation, labelled "emblematic ethnicity," to a more recent one, the "latent ethnicity." According to De Lucia, "emblematic" ethnicity focused on "the ways in which immigrants and their children struggled to overcome discrimination and elaborated a new identity borne out of the interaction of Italian and mainstream American elements" (27). Gradually, "emblematic" ethnicity has been replaced by a different mode, defined "latent"; the latter is the product of a "second diaspora"—from city ghettos to the suburbs—and of progressive cultural integration into the mainstream: the latent mode, therefore, is a way of representing ethnicity which sheds oppositional elements of the culture and reinvents identity by relying on neutralized and sanitized symbols.

Central to this study is the concept of "cultural fiction," a label broadly including representations of a specific culture produced in different forms—from novels to films and newspaper articles—by both insiders and outsiders of a specific group. The author's effort goes in the direction of finding common ground by intersecting viewpoints and media and thus identifying the narrative representation of the group as discourse, where insider views and visions from the mainstream are understood in continuous and dialectic relationship. However, fiction takes the lion's share of De Lucia's effort, and her forays into cinema, however insightful, fail to do justice to the extremely complex interaction between Italian Americans and the big screen.

Historical and cultural conflicts are crucial determiners in the shaping of these cultural fictions, and, in particular, the book identifies in WWII the “watershed period” responsible for a major restructuring of the defining ideas of ethnicity. The war effort allowed Italian Americans to assert their loyalty to the host country, the United States, without “feeling disloyal to their roots” (11). The fight against the Fascist regime was increasingly seen as liberation of the mother country, whose oppressed population did not possess the strength to break free from the dictatorship. Quite significantly, however, this episode remains underrepresented in Italian-American fictions, as, De Lucia notes, memories of this period are still “ambivalent and troubled,” a sign that official discourse did not completely overlap with private perceptions.

Spread throughout three chapters, the analysis of the “cultural fictions” that have accompanied or reflected on the crucial transition of the Italian-American community from the 1920s to the 1950s provide the most interesting contribution in De Lucia’s work, as the author charts this dark territory thanks to meticulous work on available sources. The very lack of significant fictionalizations of the period in question, in either book or cinematic form, highlights the traumatic effect that the whole war experience had on the community. *Italian American Cultural Fictions*, in this perspective, proves to be an invaluable synthesis as the scholar has managed to put together a sizeable amount of documents digging in different directions, which prove essential in making sense of this oxymoronic Italian-American tale of oblivion.

The first part of this survey, “Documenting Fascism and World War II in an Italian-American Perspective,” on the one hand registers the division of the Italian-American press in two opposite camps; the pro-Fascist, which urged the community to cling to national culture and values, and an anti-fascist cohort which started gaining ground after the invasion of Ethiopia and the consequent end of Washington’s benign attitude towards Mussolini. This latter group emphasized continuity between opposition to the regime and Americanism, even employing to its advantage the symbolic circumstance of Garibaldi’s birthday occurring on July the 4<sup>th</sup>. The chapter concludes with Frank Capra’s propaganda movies (*Why We Fight*, 1943) where, more than the content itself, it is the director’s ethnic background which, according to De Lucia, becomes part of the cultural fiction: in fact, the opportunity of having an Italian American who nurtured no qualms about which side to support proved to be a strong propagandistic move for the USA and contributed in framing America’s role in the conflict in a positive light.

The second part of this module, “Fictions and Memoirs of the Italian-American War Experience,” posits a crucial distinction between an official discourse, as shown in John Hersey’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel from 1944, *A Bell for Adano*, and marginal sites of controversy as found in two works by Italian-American writers. Hersey’s novel can be seen in continuity with Capra’s propaganda movies, with the main character, Major Joppolo, an idealized figure of rectitude with saint-like features, who symbolizes the unproblematic allegiance to countries at war with each other. Joppolo is “an integrated American who is capable of making effective use of his immigrant background” (82); ethnic origin is turned into insider knowledge and becomes a crucial asset for winning over the Italian population and paving the way for the liberation of the country. The only works by Italian Americans where

the war, albeit obliquely, is addressed, are Mario Puzo's first novel, *The Dark Arena* (1955), and Gay Talese's memoir *Unto the Sons* (1992), both providing evidence of an antagonistic ethnic stance alongside the official narrative. Puzo's work has an Italian-American protagonist, Walter Mosca, a veteran who fails to readjust to the society back home: according to De Lucia, "by antagonising the society of early post-war reconstruction," Mosca "makes the opposite journey to the standard one for Italian Americans who served in the army" (78), thus hinting at a problematic negation of the triumphalism that dominated public discourse. In Talese's memoir, instead, the author's father is portrayed as deeply conflicted between his public and private selves, showing an "almost schizophrenic combination of an endorsement of American values and an atavistic connection to roots" (83). The same silence is the main element emerging from the following chapter, which details the internment of Italian Americans following Executive Order 9066. This controversial phase of the community's history is briefly described by Jerre Mangione in his *An Ethnic At Large* (1978) and in a belated collection of testimonials from former interns in Lawrence DiStasi's *Una storia segreta* (2001)—another signal that "while the war acted as a catalyst for the group's process of integration, it also forced Italian Americans to repress and minimize certain elements of their culture" (90).

*Italian American Cultural Fictions* considers the "cultural amnesia" (163) regarding the war years as the necessary prelude paving the way for new, individual and more pacified forms of ethnicity which belong in the "latent" mode. This momentous passage, far from being exclusive to the community of Italian descent, is part of the postwar "second" diaspora from urban ghettos to leafy and spacious suburbs. De Lucia's wide catalogue of "latent" ethnics include intriguing readings of Don DeLillo, Anthony Giardina and the Afro-Italian-American Kim Ragusa, each showing different strategies of individual reinvention and incorporation of their cultural background.

In this perspective, the more recent evolution of Italian-American writing that is offered in the last part of *Italian American Cultural Fictions* highlights one of the problematic features of the "latent" restructuring of ethnic representation: in her survey of female writing in chapter 6, De Lucia underlines how both Mari Benasutti and Rita Ciresi employ cliché and caricature in representing Italian-American characters. In her reading, the scholar connects this choice to different individual causes, an interpretation consistent with her more general understanding of the "latent" mode as an "interior and non-essentialist trait" (165); the feeling remains, however, that a wider, more collective factor might be at work: if, as Fred Gardaphé suggested, Italian Americans are "whites" on a "leash," are the writers unconsciously voicing a deeper sense of unease, result of the lingering stigma affecting Italian Americans? Is the "latent-ethnic" writer, in his/her pursuit of a successful integration between heritage and the larger American scene, fighting a battle against mainstream "cultural fictions" that pigeonhole Italians into a small number of pre-determined roles? Can this fight be considered, or aspire to be considered, as a collective task for Italian Americans?

In an age of transmedial narratives, De Lucia's introduction of the "cultural fiction" concept provides a useful perspective to approach the often heterogeneous and multi-faceted discourses constructed around minority and marginal groups. Her subdivision of the Italian-American cultural narrative in two phases, persuasively

grounded on specific historical conditions, helps making sense of the evolution and changes within the Italian-American tradition. Her investigation into several instances of the “latent” mode provide convincing support for the interpretation of its connection with the multiple possibilities of negotiating an identity that opened up after WWII. *Italian American Cultural Fictions* will provide a precious reference point for further research on this controversial period of Italian-American cultural history, and scholars might want to follow De Lucia’s example of identifying narrative strands into disparate and seemingly non-narrative sources.

Sostene M. Zangari

**Randall J. Stephens. *The Devil’s Music: How Christians Inspired, Condemned, and Embraced Rock ‘n’ Roll*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018. 337 pages.**

Two films a couple of years apart encapsulate both the history of rock and roll, especially its roots, and what was best in the music in the 1970s. The film that primarily deals with the roots of rock is the popular cult film *The Blues Brothers* of 1980, which in the course of its humorous narrative frames rock and its roots between the Gospel number “The Old Landmark” performed by James Brown and the James Cleveland Choir and the eponymous Blues Brothers’ version of “Jailhouse Rock,” made famous by the King. The history is augmented with a number of classic blues and soul numbers by some the most outstanding artists of their respective musical modes. The other film is the landmark rockumentary *The Last Waltz of The Band*, brought to the screen in 1978 by that great rock fan Martin Scorsese, who had participated in making the now largely dated classic rockumentary *Woodstock*. *The Last Waltz*, on the other hand, showcases rock at its very best, making a strong case in the opinion of the reviewer that this popular music at its zenith could be called great art, which in that sense remains “forever young.”

What connects both films to the book under review is their take on the connection between rock and religion that Randall Stephens explores at length from a cultural history perspective. In the films we see and hear this history in a tangible fashion. In *The Last Waltz* quite pertinent is the rock-hymn “Forever Young,” performed on screen by a certain Nobel laureate to be who wrote it years before his overtly Christian album *Slow Train Coming* that was yet to come. More significantly, the film captures the inspired rendition of The Band’s classic “The Weight,” with the vocal support of the superlative Gospel group the Staples. The Gospel group did not have to depart from their métier to any great degree in their stirring contribution to this rock song’s performance, almost appropriating it from The Band, and demonstrating its debt to their spiritual music tradition. More directly related to Stephens’ study is the James Brown number referred to above, where the great soul artist reprises the “Devil destroying” routines—including “hard singing”: “shouting, keening, moaning, screaming, and exhortation” (Bayles 156)—of his musical mentor Ira Tucker, which in his career Brown had partially incorporated into his secular style. In other words, what both films largely prove in their own fashion is the first part of Stephens’ claim, that religion inspired rock. The book scrupulously charts the historical dynamics of

how the “Devil destroying” music played a role in inspiring what many American Christians felt was “the Devil’s music,” only to change their minds and give rise to the powerful trend of Christian rock.

Stephens’ version of the story begins through outlining the close connection between Southern Pentecostalism and a number of crucial initiators of rock and roll. Artists such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash all shared Pentecostal or similar Church of holiness roots. Elvis Presley, among others, acknowledged his religious background but claimed there were no connections between it and his music in religious terms. Stephens, by contrast, forcefully argues that the leap from dynamic sanctified music to rock ‘n’ roll was not that great. Consequently, “The culture of southern Pentecostalism helped give birth to the new genre of rock ‘n’ roll. That religious stream was one of many that fed into the larger river of rock ‘n’ roll, but it was an important tributary” (28). When the religious services of those Pentecostal churches are described it becomes quite evident their stylized presentation in *The Blues Brothers* is not that far off from how it was. In James Baldwin’s semiautobiographical *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, set in 1930s Harlem, the congregants of the protagonist’s family’s Pentecostal church “sang with all the strength that was in them, and clapped their hands for joy” (qtd. on p. 32). James Brown has reported that the posts in the church he attended had to be padded so that congregants taken by the spirit would not inadvertently hurt themselves.

However, virtually the same environment that bred the first generation of rock and rollers also produced some of the strongest criticisms of the new musical form. Symbolic of the close proximity from rocker to condemnation is the family relationship between Jerry Lee Lewis and Pentecostal televangelist Jimmy Lee Swaggart, who even used his musical cousin as an illustration and “a stern warning to youngsters and their parents” (2). This war for the souls of the nation’s youth, as Stephens presents it, had its ups and downs. At the onset of the ’60s rock’s initial fervor seemed to have dissipated, ostensibly providing relief for its critics. The King had been drafted into armed service, Buddy Holly and others died in tragic accidents, some artists, like Little Richard, even returned to the ministry. But this was just a lull in the storm as the Beatles and their music rose and John Lennon made his unwieldy statement about the band being more popular than Jesus, which set the fires ablaze again in conservative Christian hearts. Nevertheless, the spiritual striving of the hippy generation eventually fell flat and many of the disaffected youth returned to Jesus in the end. This was by no means stepping into the same river twice, however, and the religious expression of the new generation hardly resembled that of their elders. A symbolic turning point was the Dallas Explo ’72 festival—so close on the heels of Woodstock—which attracted two hundred thousand youth. From there Christian rock would steadily develop into a multi-million dollar industry by the next decade, and would garner a billion dollars a year by the late 1990s.

This synopsis hardly does justice to the rich story Stephens relates. He deftly plots the account against the political and cultural background of the represented time span and fills it with vivid detail and stimulating insights. The author sees the roots of the Pentecostal appropriation of the culture of the times together with the later appropriation of rock by Christians stemming from the dynamics of outsider religious movements and their flexibility. He gives the example of William Booth, the founder of the similarly

non-mainstream Salvation Army in Britain in the nineteenth century, who states: “The music of the Army is not, as a rule, original. We seize upon the strains that have already caught the ear of the masses, we load them with our one great theme—salvation—and so we make the very enemy help us fill the air with our Saviour’s fame” (12).

Such a tactic is hardly new in the history of Christianity. Pope Gregory famously instructed the bishop Augustine in his efforts to convert the Anglo Saxons to remove the idols from the pagan temples but to save the edifices themselves where people had been gathering and sprinkle them with holy water. Even Saint Paul himself had claimed he was willing to be all things to all people if it would bring them to Christ. Acculturation has been a particular forte of the Catholic imagination (Greeley)—one of the reasons for the widely differing religious traditions in Catholic countries—but it is not restricted to one branch of Christianity and Stephens’ account demonstrates this: his portrait of the Pentecostals is particularly engaging. That this process produced tension within Christianity is also not new; the trouble the Jesuits had in gaining official acceptance for their efforts to use far reaching acculturation in their missionary effort in the Orient serves as a prime example. The more recent instantiation of these dynamics documented in *The Devil’s Music* further proves their deep hold in the religion.

Stephens notes a particular phenomenon accompanying the rise of Christian rock that begs further examination. Although the rise of Christian rock as a separate branch in the entertainment industry is important cultural history, what is quite significant is the engagement of major rock artists such as Van Morrison or Bob Dylan with the form for at least a part of their career. Even the Beatles touched upon it with the deeply moving “Let It Be”: one of their most memorable songs before they broke up. This phenomenon is worth probing deeper.

It is well known that religion has inspired much of the great art over the millennia. Why then should it not have influenced rock to some degree? Certainly the extent and depth of the influence is worth a fuller investigation, and not just through its more overt expression for which Stephens lays a sound groundwork. Where should one begin such a query? One of the vocalists from the Staples gives a hint at the very end of “The Weight” sequence of *The Last Waltz*. Deeply moved by the effort and its poignant result she exclaims: “Beautiful!” Would it be too much to claim that what the singer intuitively felt is that in this song Gospel music met rock at the transcendentals: truth, beauty and the good? Perhaps, but it is hard to think of a more appropriate appraisal of the music than through its affinity to this currently overlooked if not forgotten quality. And where you have the transcendentals, the Transcendent cannot be that far away.

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**Joy Katzmarzik. *Comic Art and Avant-Garde: Bill Watterson's 'Calvin and Hobbes' and the Art of American Newspaper Comic Strips*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019. 298 pages.**

Newspaper comic strips are one of the most accessible and well-known examples of American popular culture. As M. Thomas Inge points out, “[a]long with jazz, the comics strip as we know it perhaps represents America’s major indigenous contribution to world culture” (xi). *Peanuts*, *Dilbert*, and *Garfield*, to name just a few, have entertained readers for years, mixing humor with political commentary and social criticism. As such, as objects of academic and critical interest, comic strips are located at a creative and compelling intersection of literary studies, cultural studies, visual studies, media studies, American studies, and comics studies. Indeed, newspaper comic strips and their scholarly investigation have been marked by a peculiar paradox. On the one hand, recent years has seen an unprecedented resurgence of graphic novel and comics studies, triggered by the publication of such contemporary masterpieces as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1986), Chris Ware’s *Jimmy Corrigan* (2000), or Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* (2006), as well as the never-ending interest in the DC and Marvel universes. On the other hand, while so much attention has been given to longer graphic works, newspaper comic strips, popular as they are, have been somewhat neglected in comics studies. While numerous anthologies of various comic strips (*The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics* (1977), *The Comic Strip Century: Celebrating 100 Years of an American Art Form* (1995), or publications in “the complete” format, such as, for example, *The Complete Peanuts*) and studies highlighting the cultural significance of the form (*Comics as Culture* (1990)) have been published at least since the 1970s, few books actually provided an insightful analysis of concrete titles.

Joy Katzmarzik, in her study *Comic Art and Avant-Garde*, published as a part of “The American Studies Monograph Series” edited for the German Association for American Studies, examines the genre of newspaper comic strips through the lens of Bill Watterson’s *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985-1995). Thus, while she firmly positions her research within the critical framework of cultural studies, she also expands it by constructively engaging with the notion of the medium per se. As such, Katzmarzik’s book adds to the growing field of more specialized studies of newspaper strips, including David Kunzle’s *Father of the Comic Strip: Rodolphe Töpffer* (2007) or Michael Tisserand’s *Krazy: George Herriman, a Life in Black and White* (2016). Drawing on Amy L. Devitt’s *Writing Genres* (2004), Katzmarzik structures her analysis around the central question of the genre, the newspaper comic strip, and examines *Calvin and Hobbes* from a multifaceted perspective, in which both form and content of the strip play an important role. Each of the five chapters centers on a given genre question, such as the definition of the newspaper comic strip, its history, formal features, and, finally, its capability to comment on the realities of the 1980s and the 1990s, as evidenced by *Calvin and Hobbes* specifically. As such, all chapters in the book may be treated as a mini-study of a particular issue, which, bit by bit, build on one another to provide the reader with a comprehensive view of Watterson’s work. As Katzmarzik herself observes in the introduction (14), such an approach has both its advantages and limitations, because she is able to highlight certain issues at the expense of others.

In any case, thanks to the elaborate and yet rigid structure of the book, Katzmarzik takes the reader step-by-step through all the different facets of *Calvin and Hobbes*. In the extensive introduction, which is listed in the table of contents as the first chapter, the reader is presented with various perspectives on studying newspaper comic strips, which, however, are limited to rather general and evident questions of humor, popular culture, and downplaying comics as an art form. Indeed, in her introductory discussion of Leslie Fiedler's *Waiting for the End* (1965) or David Kunzle's two-volume history of early comic strips (1973, 1990), the author appears to address rather obvious questions, as the current research on the form has already dealt with such issues. In the second part of the introduction, Katzmarzik presents the general premise of the strip and its main characters, locating the 6-year-old Calvin in an intertextual field of adolescent protagonists and the history of religion (with John Calvin as the obvious reference). She characterizes Calvin as a "hybrid" character, neither and both a child and an adult (25), and further refers to him as a "pragmatist," "sentimentalist" and "philosopher" (26-28). Respectively, Hobbes, neither and both a stuffed and a real tiger, is seen as "a parody of Thomas Hobbes's ego-centered worldview" (32). And intriguing as these points are, unfortunately, due to the structure to which the author adheres, they are further developed only in chapter five.

Indeed, in the following three chapters, Katzmarzik focuses on the formal features of newspaper comic strips. In the second chapter, she comments on various working definitions of comics and the implied hybrid nature of the form. And as relevant as these issues are, they nevertheless constitute a mere background for what appears to be of most interest to the reader in this study, namely the approach to the comic strip itself. Once again, it is in the final section of Chapter Two that Katzmarzik raises some interesting points. For one, instead of simply focusing on the formal features of the comic strip, such as sequentiality, length, verbal-visual narration and the presence of a recurring cast, which have been analysed by the majority of comics scholars, she treats the medium of the strip as a starting point for a functional analysis. Indeed, Katzmarzik argues that "the question of... function is equally important to grasp the genre and goes beyond a mere normative level by posing the question of [its] narrative potential beyond the narrative structures imposed on [it]" (44). She subsequently lists the functions of the comic strip that, though crucial, have often been overlooked in "purely" medial studies. These functions include the ability to elicit sympathy and the presence of "recurring surprise" that, when combined, have "the potential to confront the reader with the deepest questions of human nature" (46). Once again, however, this argument is somewhat cut short and the full "functional" potential of *Calvin and Hobbes* is unpacked in the fifth chapter.

What follows in the third chapter is a historical overview of how the comic strip has fulfilled its functions since the 1890s to the 1990s. The author traces the development of the genre since the times of *Hogan's Alley*, and the cult figure of the Yellow Kid, *Little Nemo*, and *Krazy Kat*, which first freely explored the potential of the form. Then, Katzmarzik focuses on the so-called Golden Age of Comics, i.e. the 1930s and the 1940s, comments on the censorship of comics in the 1950s (brought about by the publication of Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954), and, finally, describes the impact of Pop Art on comics in general. The "general" reader

will of course greatly benefit from such a historical overview. The “specialist” reader, a comics scholar or a cultural scholar, however, could browse through this section as it is largely based on Robert C. Harvey’s *The Art of Funnies* (1994), Jean-Paul Gabillet’s *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (2010), or *From Comics Strips to Graphic Novels* (2013) edited by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon. Once again, the most insightful section is the final one, in which Katzmarzik locates Watterson’s work in the context of the 1980s and the 1990s. She demonstrates that while Watterson himself was never involved in the underground and avant-garde comix scene which flourished in the 1980s (with Robert Crumb and Art Spiegelman as its main representatives), even as the so-called mainstream artist he still insisted that newspaper comic strips should be regarded as an art form. Indeed, in his struggle for greater artistic freedom, Watterson is presented as a unique figure in the mercantile world of mainstream publishing. Katzmarzik quotes from and analyses numerous interviews with Watterson. She also extensively refers to a lecture given by the artist at Ohio State’s Festival of Cartoon Art in 1989, tellingly entitled “On the Cheapening of Comics.” It is at this point in the book that Katzmarzik lifts the veil on why she refers to avant-garde in the title of her study, as Watterson emerges as a radical and unorthodox artist. He actively opposed the market rules which governed the publication of his strip and, as Katzmarzik points out, stopped *Calvin and Hobbes* in 1995, that was at the time during which the strip enjoyed its greatest popularity.

Chapter four, in turn, examines in detail the formal features of comic strips, systematically arranging various graphic and narrative techniques. Katzmarzik discusses layout, panel composition, character design, background, and lettering first, roughly drawing from Will Eisner’s classic work *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985). Such a general discussion is followed by a thorough analysis of selected strips from *Calvin and Hobbes*. Katzmarzik demonstrates how Watterson manages to do a sort of balancing act between the limitations that the form implies (which have to do with space, length, etc.) and his avant-garde aspirations, playing with panel shape, colour, perspective, and composition. Of course, the ultimate goal of such an analysis is not to give media studies “its due,” but to demonstrate that the comic strip, similarly to other visual narratives, narrates through its structure. Indeed, as Katzmarzik points out, Watterson uses “the visuals as an active narrative element” (150). In what appears to be a somewhat unforeseen pairing, Katzmarzik then moves on to a discussion of humour. Though crucial in a study devoted to the comic strip, the analysis of humour nevertheless seems at odds with a very systematic and methodical examination of the formal and structural features of the comic strip. Still, Katzmarzik sets to analyse the forms of humour with the same precision, listing incongruity of characters, literal meaning of words, unexpected references, unexpected places, and unexpected reaction of objects as the main features of humour in the comic strip. She refers to a number of classic strips and classic literary texts to exemplify the mechanisms of humour, demonstrating that, when assessed against such a background, *Calvin and Hobbes* once again does not “play by the rules,” but rebels against the expectations of the mass market and the mass audience.

Indeed, as Katzmarzik subsequently demonstrates in the fifth and final chapter of her study, *Calvin and Hobbes*, a work of art in itself, does not shy away from

engaging in a political and cultural debate. Of course, Katzmarzik understands what the capabilities and the limitations of the medium of the comic strip are and, thanks to the argument that has been presented in the book so far, the reader is fully aware of them as well, yet she is able to see the political behind the ostensibly humorous. In a somewhat ironic, but at the same time instructive, manner, the chapter begins with a quotation from an interview with Bill Watterson, who points out that “[i]f you draw anything more subtle than a pie in the face, you’re considered a philosopher. You can sneak in an honest reflection once in a while, because readers rarely have their guard up” (175). With that thought in mind, Katzmarzik sets to discuss Watterson’s comic strip in the broad context of the 1980s and the early 1990s in America, with a particular focus on issues such as religion, the environment, and the role of television. *Calvin and Hobbes* is seen as “a humorous blueprint of society” (176). It uses fragmentation to parody and exaggerate certain trends and ideas.

The analyses of the selected strips that follow truly constitute one of the most interesting sections of the book. Katzmarzik looks at the (post)Puritan American society of the 1980s and demonstrates how the comic strip, and Calvin in particular (the reference to John Calvin is of course highlighted at this point), parodies postmodern ethics. Respectively, drawing on Watterson’s life-long interest in modernist art and its principles, with a particular focus on the notions of craft, authorship, and creativity, Katzmarzik then moves on to examine the role and status of post-modernist art, as presented in the strip. She reads *Calvin and Hobbes* in terms of its critique of post-modernist artistic “gimmicks,” such as self-staging, downplaying the role of skill and talent, and inventing -isms in an attempt to legitimize what is often derivative. This pairing of religion and art explored in the first part of the final chapter finds its counterpart in the combined discussion of ecology and mass media that follows. While Calvin is seen as a character who tends to romanticize nature in a truly transcendentalist fashion, as the child of the 1980s, he also ultimately renounces it for the sake of television. Indeed, Watterson’s work in general is seen as a parody and exaggeration of certain contemporary trends.

As a whole, the book effectively discusses how Watterson’s work builds on the existing tradition of the comic strip genre, exploring its possibilities and limitations to comment on the America of the 1980s and the early 1990s. It is a truly interesting and engaging read.

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**Carmen Rueda-Ramos and Susana Jiménez Placer, eds. *Constructing the Self: Essays on Southern Life-Writing*. València: Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2017. 370 pages.**

*Constructing the Self: Essays on Southern Life-Writing* is a crowning achievement of the Research Group “Discourse and Identity” at the University of Santiago de Compostela. The book is the 147<sup>th</sup> volume in the “Biblioteca Javier Coy d’estudis nord-americans” series published by Publicacions de la Universitat de València. The nuanced readings of southern autobiographical writing not only suggest the continuing relevance of the works the edited volume explores, but also the importance of what these southern texts set out to show: that southern autobiographical writing not only (re)constructs and performs the self, but also presents a self-image of southern culture embracing the plurality of selves. *Constructing the Self* is a triumph of collaborative work by eighteen contributors from all around Europe and the USA working within southern studies. It is from this international collaboration that the book draws its strength. Carmen Rueda-Ramos and Susana Jiménez Placer managed to compile a truly impressive list of renowned scholars collaborating on this book project, yet the editors were able to unify these numerous voices into a cohesive text divided into five interrelated and cross-linked sections.

This division of essays “loosely reflects the development of southern life-writing, from its beginning to more recent approaches to autobiographical works that incorporate contemporary critical theories and perspectives” (31). The book progresses

from analyses of the subversive quality of the earliest autobiographical writings by African Americans, narratives reconciling the self across the color line, blurred generic boundaries between autobiography and fiction, and on to further transgressions of the memoir genre, to end with the final section, devoted to pilgrimages of self-discovery.

Carmen Rueda-Ramos and Susana Jiménez Placer did a commendable job in covering all the conceptual ground in an ambitious and well-researched introduction to the book entitled “The Enduring Impulse to Tell about the Self and the South.” A better introduction to the subject matter of *Constructing the Self* is hard to find. It is a highly informative guide to which readers may confidently turn for an enlightened condensation of southern autobiographical writing. The introduction is a treasure trove of names and titles, the sort of piece that would work well as an introductory essay for a course in southern life-writing. The editors researched the topic with full realization of the vast socio-cultural context needed to create this impressive road map to an expansive body of literature.

The book opens with the section “Subversive (re)creations of the Self – Past and Present” which has two essays in which renowned southern literary critics analyze how African American life-writing authors constructed themselves in a social environment which conspired against them. In the opening essay “‘My Story is Better than Yours’: The Changing Politics of and Motives for Composing Southern African American Life Narratives,” Trudier Harris analyzes the contrasting impulses that moved African American southern writers: the impulse to bear witness to a collective experience (communal concerns, Frederick Douglass or Booker T. Washington) or to engage in literary self-creation (individualistic concerns, e.g. Zora Neal Hurston), or to express social consciousness (embracing activism, e.g. Maya Angelou, Alice Walker or Anne Moody).

This social aspect of African American autobiographies is also the main focus of Robert Brinkmeyer’s essay “Working a Lever: Booker T. Washington’s Autobiographies as Tools for Social Change.” Brinkmeyer examines the subversive potential of Washington’s autobiographical writings—a potential embedded in Washington’s theories on practical education and the dignity of meaningful manual labor performed by African Americans. In his nuanced reading of Washington’s life-writings through the prism of “economic-social gospel” Brinkmeyer challenges a common belief in Washington’s accommodationist and reactionary ideas (as evidenced in the writer’s ideas about economic advancement rather than political agitation).

The next section, “The Legacy of Race: Reconciling Selves,” brings other readings of southern life-writings across the racial spectrum. The four essays contained in this section focus on the continuing racial divide and on attempts to form meaningful relationships across the color line. The first essay, “‘I Knew Then Who I Was’: Memory, Narrative, and Sense of Self in Autobiographies of the Jim Crow South,” offers the interesting perspective of a historian reading literary texts. Jennifer Ritterhouse does not reduce autobiographical narratives to “factual” records of historical events. Nor does she simply read them as scripts or patterns. She suggests, rather, an analysis of subjective lived experiences. She brilliantly problematizes “the truth-value” of retrospective stories of childhood racial learning from the Jim Crow South.

In the next contribution, “Daily Encounters: The Coming of Age of Melton A. McLaurin,” Elizabeth Hayes Turner analyzes McLaurin’s *Separate Pasts: Growing Up*

*White in the Segregated South* as a “conversion narrative.” A historian by profession, McLaurin wrote of his own lived experience, a decision that served as a therapeutic act which allowed him to deal with the past. In her article Hayes Turner provides an engaging and informative account of McLaurin’s self-transformation through a series of stages which led to his rejection of family paternalism and of the role of the privileged white man.

The legacy of race is also the subject of the essay written by Pearl McHaney. In her “Life Writing in Poetry and Prose: Natasha Trethewey’s Personal and National Revelations” she discusses how US Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey’s interweaves her own personal story with the history of her region and nation in her poetry and prose. McHaney skillfully identifies and locates Trethewey’s life story on the larger canvas of national histories—stories of racism, poverty, cotton, the Jim Crow Laws, and the unrecognized work of the Louisiana Native Guards. Telling her own story—McHaney proves—gave Trethewey a chance to uncover and/or recover untold or erased stories which constitute shared knowledge: “Trethewey’s life writing in prose and poetry emanates from the personal, but her imperative is to reveal us to ourselves, as insisting that our history is a shared history.”

The issues of race and racial reconciliation also segue into the final essay of this section. In “Southern Autobiography Around the Table of Brotherhood: A Dream Deferred, a Dream Deceased, and Dream Destroyed, a Dream Dismissed?” Ineke Bockting explores racial relations through the prism of commensality, first denied across the color line and then subversively performed during the Civil Rights Movement. Using Martin Luther King’s “table of brotherhood” metaphor Bockting probes the themes of abundance, success and innocence in various southern life writings.

The third section, “Authors, Narrators, and Fictionalized Selves,” turns the discussion of life-writings away from the perspective of how and why racial identities are performed and constructed and towards stylistic analysis of the genre and discussion of the fictionalization of life-writings. In her discussion of “Memoirs’ Characters: Writer, Narrator, Protagonist” Peggy Whitman Prenshaw interrogates the three components of the memoir—the voices of the writer, storytelling narrator, and protagonist—using autobiographies written by southern women as examples. Prenshaw probes how Ellen Douglas’s, Mary Karr’s, and Maya Angelou’s stories relate to the credibility of life writings, to truth telling, and to sensory details engaging the readers.

While the following contributions in this section generally refer to the fictionalization of memoirs (analysis of a given author’s factual self and fictionalized self), Thomas L. McHaney’s essay “Faulkner and Autobiography in Fiction” offers an intriguing analysis of Faulkner’s “embellished autobiography” in his fiction. Faulkner’s other biographers “have given attention to the writer’s propensity for biographical application and exaggeration in his poetry and fiction” or, in other words, to Faulkner’s inclination towards “impersonations, imitations, fabrications, fictional personas, role-playing, and legends about himself.” Unlike such biographers, Thomas McHaney, manifesting copious and fascinating knowledge about his subject, carefully reads one of Faulkner’s letters and points out how information included in it might enrich our understanding of *The Sound and the Fury*.

Gerald Préher’s article “‘A Someone Somewhere’: Locating Richard Ford’s

Southern Self in his Fiction and Non-Fiction” traces Ford’s ambivalent stance towards his southern origin and his being labeled a southern author. Préher traces Ford’s inner struggle and love-hate relationship with the South in *The Sportswriter*. In the closing essay in this section, “Self-Fashioning and Philippe Labro’s ‘Southern Memoir’ *The Foreign Student*,” Nahem Yousaf offers an analysis of the “memoir with the texture of fiction.” Yousaf provides depth to his analysis of how Labro’s southern exposure in his youth influenced his self-fashioning as author through historically rich contextualization of changes southern culture has undergone and his elegant articulation of the metamorphoses of life writing as genre. Actually, Yousaf claims that one informs the other: the hybridity of the genre (Labro’s text as either “an autobiographical novel”, “true tale” or “a memoirlike novel”) might reflect the transcultural perspective on a book written by a French journalist who was an international student in Virginia in the 1950s.

Part four, “Transgressors and Performers of Self,” brings exhaustive discussions about the strategies southern women use to construct and deconstruct their selves. Carmen Rueda-Ramos’s “Appalachian Women’s Autobiographies from the Margins: Crossing the Boundaries of the Genre” brilliantly analyzes the transgressive quality of life narratives written by marginalized women. The life writings chosen for the analysis “do not conform to the conventional specifications of the genre.” Rueda-Ramos’s reading of Appalachian women’s autobiographical narratives as “outlaw genres” is particularly enlightening—the author points to the ability of generic hybridization to blur the boundaries between the individual and collective.

A different form of transgression is analyzed by Susana Jiménez Placer in her article “‘Pariahs for Flattering Reasons’: Confessions of Failed Southern Ladies on the Black Help.” In contradistinction to Rueda-Ramos’s article about Appalachian women’s “relational auto/biographies,” Jiménez Placer’s captivating work sheds light on societal transgressions of southern ladies in a series of southern autobiographies. Her analysis of Virginia Foster Durr’s, Florence Kings’, and Shirley Abbott’s memoirs concentrates on depictions of rebellious acts against traditional expectations towards ladies and mummies.

The next two essays in this section address the issue of performativity. Beata Zawadka’s contribution “‘A Tarnished Lady?’: Tallulah Bankhead’s Southern Performance in Hollywood” offers an insight into the southern actress’s self-reflective characterization in her acting style (reenactment of the status of the white elite southern female). In her analysis of Bankhead’s self-fashioning Zawadka pushes the traditional boundaries of the autobiographical genre. While performance of white elite ladyhood in Zawadka’s article is identified as “drag,” performance in the last essay in this section, Sandra Ballard’s “Grief and Humor: Appalachian Writers Using Autobiography to Find a Way Home,” relies on the use of humor. Ballard pinpoints possible uses of humor as a counterbalance to grief, which could be applicable not only in the case of Appalachian autobiographies, but also African American slave narratives, mountain memoirs, and black autobiographies.

The final section of the book, “Sites for Self-Explorations: Travel and Illness Narratives,” offers a glimpse into life-writing as a site of self-discovery. A quest for identity can take a very physical, geographical shape. That is the case in the first two essays of this section. Jesús Varela-Zapata, in “The Self Elsewhere: Alice Walker’s

Identity in the Wider World,” persuasively claims that travelling to other places allows writers to extend their activism. Varela-Zapata sees *Overcoming Speechlessness* as Walker’s travelogue engaged in international activism. He perceptively discusses the parallels between Walker’s own experiences during the Jim Crow South and then the Civil Rights era, with stories of brutality and genocide.

In “Reflecting on the Region, Revisioning the Self: John Gould Fletcher’s Song of His Life and Its Transatlantic Context” Waldemar Zacharasiewicz interprets Fletcher’s self portrait in his autobiography *Life Is My Song* as the poet’s constant attempt to find his “stable identity.” Zacharasiewicz demonstrates that suffering from bouts of manic depression and never feeling at home wherever he was (due to his feelings of cosmopolitanism), Fletcher attempted to create a sense of self affected by his travels and illness.

In her article, “The Physicality of Reminiscence: The Stimuli of the South in Bobbie Ann Mason’s *Clear Springs: A Memoir*,” Candela Delgado Marin explores Mason’s memoir from an intriguing conceptual-analytical perspective: southern autobiography as a record of bodily impressions and physical sensations. Delgado Marin chooses to treat sensory memoirs as a critical lens to analyze Bobbie Ann Mason’s exploration of her self and her native region. In the final contribution to the volume, titled “Coming to the End: The Perception of Mortality in the Autobiographical Writings of Reynolds Price and Tim McLaurin,” Marcel Arbeit turns his critical eye to an analysis of illness and disability narratives, a relatively new sub-genre of life-writing. Arbeit analyzes how authors use illness narratives to tell the story of personal struggle to reconstruct their bodies and sense of self.

The dramatic increase in authorship, publication, and readership of life writing, which has by now become mainstream in American autobiographical writing, necessitates a study of self-narratives through the prism of contemporary theories about culture, narrative, and techniques of self-representation. Demonstrating how various southerners across time and space channeled the autobiographical impulse, *Constructing the Self: Essays on Southern Life-Writing* answers that demand. It is an invaluable handbook for those who wish to have authoritative information on southern lived experience and its textual representation. Contributors to this volume not only discuss canonical autobiographies by both black and white authors, but also poetry, fictionalized autobiographies and various types of memoirs. Even though the individual essays easily stand on their own, readers will also benefit from reading the collection in its entirety due to its overarching themes. Due to the broad variety of theoretical approaches, the volume succeeds in offering breadth and depth of expertise on southern life-writing.

Contributors to this volume consulted an important array of sources, and this highly readable and extremely insightful book therefore provides rich, well-documented insights into the subject matter. *Constructing the Self* will become an invaluable research tool for any scholar wishing to study life-writing in general and southern autobiographical writing in particular. A thoughtful and engaging read, this book will be useful also for students in a variety of fields ranging from literary, cultural, African American studies to sociology and history.

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