

A COMPANION TO

A **AMERICAN**
L **LITERATURE**
AND C **CULTURE**

EDITED BY **PAUL LAUTER**

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To my grandchildren
And their companions
Who might, one day,
Draw sustenance from this book

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Introduction

Paul Lauter

The name of this book is *A Blackwell's Companion to American Literature and Culture*. That has an innocent enough sound. But each of these words, as well as the phrase “American literature,” opens into ambiguous corridors of history and culture. “Companion,” to begin with, suggests something different from “guide” or “usher,” much less “encyclopedia” or “dictionary.” The latter proposes a kind of comprehensiveness that we do not claim, nor would we, like a literary Frommer’s, direct our readers to the American “monuments of unaging intellect,” though a fair number do appear in these pages. A “companion” accompanies or shares with us, in something of a familiar way, our excursions around the varied landscapes of US culture. Every companion’s way of sharing will be different, likewise, the approaches to their subjects of the chapters in this book. There are probably as many ways of talking about American literature as there are talkers – very likely more. These chapters illustrate that creative variety. The objective of the Companion, then, is not to provide an encyclopedic listing of all the authors and literary phenomena comprehended by the term “American literature.” Rather, it is to offer readers a set of related, perhaps occasionally dissonant, perspectives on the subject that, taken together, will enable richer, more varied, more comprehensive readings of the wealth of texts produced in and around what is now the United States.

Half a century ago, the boundaries designated by “literature” – to continue with that key term of our title – seemed reasonably clear: poetry, drama, fiction, and “literary” essays by certain, though by no means all, writers, in the main male and white. The single most influential book of American literary history, F.O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* (1941), focused entirely on work by five writers: Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and Whitman. They defined what constituted “literature.” Later, that graduate student bible of the mid-twentieth century, *Literary History of the United States* (1948), edited by Robert Spiller et al., contained even in its somewhat revised third edition (1963) separate chapters that effectively defined how the *American* in the “American literary canon” had been and was constituted, written by Edwards,

Franklin, Irving, Cooper, Poe, the “big five” Matthiessen had designated, Longfellow, Holmes, and Lowell together, Lanier and Dickinson together, Twain and James. A count of the pages listed in the index in which various writers appear in the *Literary History of the United States* tells a tale not only of changes in taste and canon from then to now, but also of how the term “American” might be understood. There were *no* mentions of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Piatt, Frederick Douglass, or Frances Harper; one each of W.E.B. DuBois, Claude McKay, and Louisa May Alcott, two for Mary Wilkins Freeman, Charles Chesnutt, and Zora Neale Hurston; and three each for Anne Bradstreet, William Bradford, and Lydia Sigourney. By way of comparison, Spiller lists nine index entries for William Vaughan Moody, 12 for Bronson Alcott, 13 for Thomas Bailey Aldrich (he of that “Bad Boy” story), 15 for J.P. Kennedy, 17 for Philip Freneau, 19 for H.L. Mencken, and 30 for William Cullen Bryant. I mention these numbers not to criticize the Spiller *Literary History*; far from it, though I do have to admit that I myself teach only the last writer (Bryant) mentioned in that second list and all of those in the first (Gilman, Piatt, Douglass, and the others). Still, that *Literary History* was remarkably inclusive for its time and in its way. But the numbers do help clarify how we have defined – capaciously – the category “American” and therefore what is and is not to be found in the book you now have in hand.

In the years intervening between that *Literary History* and our “Companion,” writers unheard of in the halls of graduate study of the 1950s have come into prominence, or at least into view. In addition, forms of writing – from slave narratives to the blues, from occasional poetry to abolitionist tracts – have come to be analyzed, commented upon, and studied in literature seminars. Thus the definitions of “literature” as a dimension of culture are now less foreclosed and more open to negotiation and change. To take one particular example, this “Companion” examines much more extensively than has been the case in other surveys the variety of texts created by Native Americans. We have done so not only for their inherent interest but also because, as chapters in this Companion indicate, the historical trajectories and forms of Indian creativity are in significant ways distinctive and cannot easily be fitted into the usual Euro-American critical paradigms. For instance, Native American literature displays important connections between early tribal oral and later written texts and fundamental linkages between cultural expression and national or tribal survival. In this and a number of other ways, this Companion is designed to explore authors and texts that have, perhaps, not always received adequate attention in times past.

From another point of view, however, this extension of authors and texts reflects the changes that have reshaped what we call “American literature” in profound and positive ways. I recently read a set of proposals for fellowships to study and write about subjects in American literature submitted to a federal agency. Of these 30-something proposals, about eight focused on the work of white men, four on white women, eight on black writers, two on Native Americans, three on Latinos and Latinas, two on Asian Americans, and two on “others.” But this multicultural distribution only begins to suggest how American literature has changed since *Literary History* and *American Renaissance*. The subjects themselves are wonderfully different: black life and culture

on the Gulf coast, passing, obesity, writing “outside” the book, memoirs about Indian boarding school experience, politics and form in Objectivist poetry, among other things. This range suggests that the terrain we identify as “American literature” is vast – and changing. A book like this Companion is inevitably something of a snapshot of that expanding world, taken at a particular moment and from a rapidly moving vehicle.

Not surprisingly, our approach to authors and texts emphasizes historical and social contexts together with literary connections, *per se*. Obviously, many of our contributors have been influenced by New Historicist and American Studies approaches to the study of culture. More important, perhaps, we think it is a function of a “Companion” to point to significant features of the landscape in which literary texts are being engaged. For while a poem or story may be said, formally, to speak itself, it also speaks from, and to, particular cultural moments not transparently available in the text itself. Which is one of the places a Companion comes in.

A further word needs to be said about the title, for the phrase “American literature” is, like the content, itself highly contested, and for good reason. After all, the United States forms only one part of the Americas, and appropriating the term “American” to describe the literatures of this nation constitutes something of an imperial move. On the other hand, “United States literature” does not fully comprehend our subject, since it extends backward in time to before there was a “United States”; one could argue that Spiller’s use of the phrase represents something about the editors’ thinking about colonial and early Native American texts. Likewise, our subject is not necessarily constrained by the boundaries of what now constitutes the USA. So no one phrase will quite do. I have chosen to stay with the phrase that is most commonplace in course catalogues, syllabi, and anthologies, acknowledging its inescapable difficulties.

The three sections of this book offer distinctive if overlapping paradigms for thinking about “American literature.” Part A, titled “Genealogies of American Literary Study,” chapters 1 through 7, has to do with the ways in which American literature, as a cultural phenomenon, an historical force, and an academic subject, has been constructed and *studied* in differing moments and by different groups of people. It presents chapters focused on the *study* of literature and culture in North America, ways of thinking about the *literature* of writers’ own times, and how that has changed in time. It also offers genealogies of key terms in the study of American literature – like multiculturalism, sentimentality, modernism – as well as frameworks for that study – like the academy and the cold war. Part B, “Writers and Issues,” chapters 8 through 29, perhaps somewhat more traditionally, looks mainly at the *literary production* of individual authors and at groups of writers and literary movements, artists who interacted with and often influenced one another. Part C, “Contemporary Theories and Practices,” chapters 29 through 38, focuses on the ways current theoretical debates take shape from contemporary forms of creative expression and in turn are molded by such writing.

But there is more at stake here than the configuration of this particular book. The question remaining to be addressed is whether a volume like this will prove to be

among the last of a disappearing species. Will American literature continue to be a viable category of analysis and study? Or will it gradually flow out, one more vivid stream, into a globalized cultural sea? Will tomorrow's American writers seek their historical connections, their text milieu, in cultures outside this country's national borders more, perhaps, than within them? Will critics increasingly see literature as a product of international cultural exchanges that call into question the national boundaries implicit in the name "American literature"? The dissolution of borders is, as we know well, quite advanced when it comes to the flow of goods and capital. Borders are of decreasing relevance in art forms like music and film. If this shift from a national to a global culture proves dominant, so the argument runs, then what is being written (composed, performed, filmed) in the United States today might most usefully be approached less in terms of its connections to nineteenth- and twentieth-century US texts and more in terms of connections to Latin-American, Asian, European and African phenomena. To be sure, there will always be histories of literature in the United States and its various indigenous and colonial predecessors. But will such histories continue to occupy significant curricular space in schools and colleges, be embedded in large anthologies designed to serve such courses, be examined in volumes like this one – and be of persisting interest to students, critics and writers?

The arguments pushing toward a newly globalized paradigm for American literary study are powerful and have had significant impact on the field we continue to designate as "American studies." Literary scholars have begun to read back into the past a much more international view of US culture, perceiving Concord, for example, not as an isolated New England backwater but as a hub of international exchanges. I have myself suggested that the multicultural paradigm that has characterized American literary study in recent decades is being replaced by a new globalized paradigm that I have called "immigration shock."¹ More than ever we have come to see literature as a powerful force piercing boundaries, linking human experiences, and opening worlds of beauty and pain that had been hidden from us. And we perceive the world – to use Peter Sellars' wonderful phrasing of it – not as corporations do, "everyone the same, but not equal," but as the arts do: "everyone equal, but not the same."²

All the same, as I think the chapters in this book demonstrate, the study of American literature as a discrete field remains full of life and imagination. It is not so much that nationalism is unlikely to fade away any time soon, or that borders are and will likely remain regions of conflict. It is, rather, that the study of the various literatures spoken and written within the boundaries of what is now the United States continues to engage the creative energies of scholars and students across the globe. The dynamism of this particular cultural moment is deeply inflected by the globalizing processes to which I have alluded. But the quality and interest of American texts, from Melville to Morrison and from Zuni to Ashberry, remains undiminished, in significant measure because the literatures of this America illuminate as nothing else has done the aspirations, the contradictions, the dangers and possibilities of this society. And very little, as we end this first decade of the twenty-first century, seems more important than comprehending the creativity and hazards of the United States. That, it seems to me,

is what these chapters illustrate, drawing upon our past but remaining open to the changes that are, as we work, reconstructing the house of *American literature*.

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Paul Lauter

NOTES

- 1 Paul Lauter, "From Multiculturalism to Immigration Shock," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1 (1) 2009, <http://repositories.cdlib.org/acgcc/jtas/vol1/iss1/art10>.
- 2 Talk at Mostly Mozart festival, New York, August 15, 2009.

Part A

Genealogies of American
Literary Study

The Emergence of the Literatures of the United States

Emory Elliott

Multicultural Origins

In 1820 in the *Edinburgh Review*, the Scottish critic, Sydney Smith took aim at the budding culture of the United States with these snide questions: “Who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?” (Elliott, 2002: 170). His implication, of course, was that no one did because what passed for arts and letters in the United States was unworthy of notice. Over 300 years after the arrival of Columbus, this assertion, even if an exaggeration, only heightened the cultural inferiority complex already felt by many Americans in relation to Europe. But the fact was that a major reason that few people read American books in 1820 was that the lack of copyright regulations allowed American booksellers to print large numbers of English books and sell them cheaply without paying royalties. There was little incentive for publishers to produce books by American writers and pay them the required royalties when pirated British books yielded high profits. When an international copyright law was passed in 1830, American writers like Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper found readerships at home and abroad. By the 1850s, many American writers were being read in Europe.

Still, Smith’s insult resonated with a discomfort that many felt then, and that many modern scholars of American literature and arts have continued to feel, about American culture, especially regarding cultural production before 1850. Until as recently as the early 1970s, a large majority of critics of American literature and the arts shared Smith’s bias, and they formulated a variety of explanations that rationalized such cultural failure. One theory was that the early settlers had been too occupied with establishing farms, trades, and communities to find time for writing and the arts. Another was that the grip of Protestantism, especially New England Puritanism, upon much of the society by the seventeenth century and since had discouraged works of the imagination as idle, if not evil, activities. Yet another widely shared opinion was that materialism and pragmatism, exemplified in a figure like Benjamin Franklin, had

nourished an emerging industrial capitalism that valued time as money that should not be wasted on unprofitable activities. While each of these factors probably did discourage some potential writers and artists, the fact is that many people managed to produce respectable art and writing in spite of such impediments.

Why then was there, for nearly 100 years, a widespread agreement that there was little produced in the arts and letters in America worthy of attention before the American Renaissance of the 1850s? The deeper, unacknowledged reason for such erasure was the compelling desire in the United States between the 1880s and the 1960s to imagine the country to be a homogenous nation of white northern Europeans and their descendants. To acknowledge a literary history of two centuries of abundant texts written in America in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, and Dutch, would be to recognize a multicultural national origin and heritage that many in the United States in the twentieth century sought to silence and erase. During those same decades, literary scholars and critics were overwhelmingly white males whose authority, to a degree, relied upon the myth of white male superiority in all endeavors. Before the 1960s, very few women writers appeared on college course reading lists with Emily Dickinson usually being the notable exception.

During the last 30 years, however, dramatic changes have occurred. Sparked by the social and political movements of the 1960s and legal and cultural changes that made colleges and universities more receptive to women and to ethnic diversity, a healthy skepticism about the assumptions of previous generations of scholars inspired critics and researchers at home and abroad to reexamine the archives of American cultural production. The result has been an extraordinary excavation of a wealth of previously excluded writings. Many previously marginalized creative people of minoritized groups have been discovered or rediscovered, including people of color, women, gays and lesbians, those who wrote in languages other than English and in a variety of forms, and the indigenous peoples in the Americas before and after the arrival of Columbus. What has emerged is a wealth of literary texts generated from before 1493 and into the present by a wide array of diverse Americans.

Whereas American literature survey courses before the 1960s usually began with Ralph Waldo Emerson and the early nineteenth century, today many introductory courses begin with the early myths and narratives of Native Americans and then turn to the considerable writings of the early explorers and colonists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While three decades ago, the New England Puritans were nearly always the first authors to appear in American anthologies, now editors include as many as 200 pages of writing produced before the English arrived. As a result of such revisionism, what is now evident is the truly multinational and multicultural beginnings of modern North America. This long multicultural heritage of the United States provides cultural coherence for understanding the diversity that characterizes the contemporary United States. Recognition of this rich heritage is certainly one of the reasons that in the last ten to fifteen years there has been among scholars and students a new interest in the Americas of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. As colonial and postcolonial studies have emerged as a major field of cultural

studies, many researchers have examined instances of first contacts between Europeans and the Native Americans and the processes of colonization and decolonization that ensued in the Americas. Others have begun to study the many different features of the settler societies and the complex roles that religions, nationalism, geo-politics, and economics played in the various colonies as well as the emergence and spread of capitalism and its relationship to Protestantism and Catholicism.

The same skepticism that led scholars to question the literary canon has produced challenges to other cherished assumptions. One problem was the use of the term “America” as synonymous with the term “United States.” While people in the United States commonly use “America” and “the United States” interchangeably, people in other countries think of these terms as having different geo-political meanings. They recognize the United States to be one nation among many in the Americas, and they find it to be arrogant, if not imperialistic, for leaders of the United States to speak of “we Americans” as if all of the other people who live in the Americas were somehow subsumed under the United States. The editors of the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* (1988) resisted the proposed title “History of American Literature” unless the volume included discussions of the literatures of all the countries of the Americas as is the case with the *Columbia History of the American Novel* (1991) that contains essays on Canadian, Latin American, and Caribbean fiction.

Another question that led to an important change was when did “American literature” or “the Literature of the United States” actually begin? For decades, anthologies opened with the Pilgrims in Massachusetts in 1620, but some scholars challenged this starting point by noting the arrival of English settlers in Jamestown in 1607 and the early writings of explorer John Smith. Once that change had been made, other scholars, especially Werner Sollors at Harvard, argued that the determination of what counts as literature in the United States should not be limited to texts in the English language alone since many important works produced in the United States have been composed in other languages (Sollors, 2000). So the starting date of American literature was moved back to 1492, and anthologies opened with the writings of Columbus and other European explorers. Before long, other scholars noted that oral literature is a legitimate form of literary expression and thus the first works of American literature would be the poetry, songs, and narratives of the indigenous peoples who were the “first Americans” and whose oral literature circulated for centuries before the arrival of Columbus. Thus, in the most recent anthologies, the words of American Indians precede those of Columbus, and students now may read substantial selections of Native American poetry and songs, oral narratives, such as the trickster stories, and examples of oratory, origin myths, history, argumentation, and religious expression. Not only do such indigenous texts open American literature anthologies now, but Native American writing appears throughout subsequent historical periods.

Among the many changes to the canon of United States literature that have resulted from the new inclusiveness of recent decades, however, the presence of Native American literature presents perhaps the greatest challenge for readers. As Andrew Wiget and other scholars have noted, each of the American Indian nations and tribes possesses

different cultures and assumptions from each other, and all of them are very different from those of the European cultures with which most non-Indian Americans are familiar. As Wiget observes: “Aesthetic values emerge from rather than transcend specific cultural contexts, and we quickly discover the limits of our own assumptions and knowledge in encountering literatures from outside the more familiar Euro-American traditions” (Lauter, 2002: 23). For such reasons, the early Native American texts are necessarily presented within the framework of information about the cultural traditions, values, and community social systems in which each text was produced. At the same time, there are many poems and narratives that speak powerfully to any audience, such as this poem written soon after the Spanish conquest of the Mayan people of Central America in 1541 and later transcribed from Mayan hieroglyphs:

They Came From the East

They came from the east when they arrived.
 Then Christianity also began.
 The fulfillment of its prophecy is ascribed to the east . . .
 Then with the true God, the true Dios,
 Came the beginning of our misery.
 it was the beginning of tribute,
 the beginning of church dues,
 the beginning of strife and purse snatching,
 the beginning of strife with blow guns;
 the beginning of strife with trampling on people,
 the beginning of robbery with violence,
 the beginning of forced debts,
 the beginning of debts enforced by false testimony,
 the beginning of individual strife,
 a beginning of vexation.

(Elliott, 1991b: 25)

New Spain and New France: A Literature of Conquest and Survival

Between 1500 and 1800, the Spanish, French, Portuguese, and, after 1607, the English also, competed vigorously to gain control of vast areas of the Americas. The Portuguese discovered the extraordinary potential for mining gold and other precious stones and metals in the territories that under their rule became Brazil. The French established colonies in what would become Canada and New England, the Great Lakes regions, Florida, and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The Spanish established their presence in South and Central America, Mexico, and formed the colonies of New Mexico (1598), Texas (1683), Arizona (1687), and California (1769). Since all three of these nations were Catholic monarchies, the Papacy and the Catholic Church were heavily invested spiritually and materially in the European conquest of the Americas, and thus missionaries worked closely with the military in supplanting the indigenous religions with Christianity. In the beginning, converting the natives to Christianity and saving their

souls was the avowed humanitarian motive for taking control of their lands. But, of course, fissures in the rhetorical fabric of their benevolent arguments reveal the materialistic drive fueling the brutal conquest.

For example, the text that usually occupies the first place among the works of European writers in most new anthologies of American literature is the entry for October 12, 1492 in *The Journal of the First Voyage of Christopher Columbus* (1492–3). The passage opens almost casually: “At two hours after midnight appeared the land, at a distance of 2 leagues.” Columbus explains that they “lay-to waiting until daylight Friday, when they arrived at an island of the Bahamas that was called in the Indians’ tongue *Guanabani*.” After immediately renaming the island San Salvador, the Spanish “took possession of the said island for the King and Queen, their Lord and Lady, making the declarations that are required, as is set forth in the testimonies which were there taken down in writing” (Elliott, 1991b: 33). With this action, the violent physical conquest began, and in this short piece of writing a more subtle rhetorical and “legal” process was also begun that would characterize much of the writing produced by the Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Americas. Within a framework of assumed religious and national superiority over the indigenous peoples, the Europeans would use their written languages to construct arguments that would rationalize and justify the blatant theft of natural resources, gold, silver, spices, foods, animals, and people from the Americas. In this short journal entry, Columbus establishes a paradigm in which “declarations” and “testimonies” are employed to transfer and rename property from the native people to the Spanish monarchy.

Not surprisingly, most of the writing of the European explorers consisted of journals, histories, and reports on experiences, places, and events in which they were both participants and observers. In many cases, the authors eloquently expressed great wonder at the beauty of the people and at the strangeness of unfamiliar plants, animals, and landscapes. Although they frequently describe the people as handsome, the fact that the Indians were most often naked, had no weapons, and appeared to the Europeans to practice no recognizable religion, provided ample justification to assume them to be their intellectual and cultural inferiors. On that Friday on *Guanabani*, Columbus observed that the first native people he saw “ought to be good servants of good skill” and “would easily be made Christians” (Elliott, 1991b: 34). He recognized that to convert them to Christianity would be to bring them under the Spanish systems of law and government and to place them on their proper rung on the Great Chain of Being where they would dutifully serve their Spanish superiors as God intended. Before the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish occupiers would learn a great deal more about the mental and physical powers of resistance of indigenous Americans, and a great many on both sides would die in the process.

One remarkable text that exemplifies the suffering, survival, and success among the Spanish colonists is the *Relacion* of Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca (1542). Cabeza de Vaca was a member of an expedition to Florida and eastern Mexico that left Spain in 1527. The 300 members of the expedition were rapidly reduced by disease, starvation, exposure, and conflicts with the native peoples. Cabeza de Vaca was one of a small group

cast ashore on the island of Malhado in the Gulf of Mexico. He survived there for five years by trading with the natives and healing the sick, and eventually he and three other survivors were able to get passage to the mainland of Florida. Then they traveled along the Gulf Coast for eight more years seeking rescue, reaching Mexico City in 1536. Cabeza de Vaca was able to return to Spain and publish his extraordinary story in 1542. As Juan Bruce-Novoa has observed, during these years, Cabeza de Vaca himself became transformed from being a Spaniard to becoming an immigrant and then *mestizo*, a hybrid who had to acculturate to the new world culture and learn new languages in order to survive. In this case, the American book that he produced was an autobiographical report to the Spanish people and his own superiors in government that served the dual purpose of sharing his knowledge of the Americas with the public and demonstrating to the leaders his skills and learning that enabled him to survive. He eventually was commissioned Governor of Paraguay (Lauter, 2002: 129).

Unlike the Portuguese and the French, who were far more tolerant of difference and willing to allow for a blending of their own religious and cultural forms with those of the indigenous people, the Spanish, and later the English, strongly resisted the pull toward cultural hybridity. Although many Spanish soldiers did take indigenous women for wives, resulting in a *mestizo* population throughout Spanish Latin America, the principles of the Spanish culture were traditional and rigid, and thus they resorted more often to violent containment and suppression of resistance and policing of acculturation rather than to negotiation or compromise. On the other hand, Brazilian Catholicism, its art, music, dance, food, and dress became a rich blend of Indian, African, and European forms and traditions.

Taking the trouble to learn the languages and cultures as well as the economic and social circumstances of the people, many of the French trappers and soldiers took Indian wives and adopted the food, clothing, and customs of the people with the expectation of staying in America and raising their families. While the French retained their Catholicism, the French clergy effectively converted a far higher number of the Indians than did the Spanish or the English clergy. Initially, many of the French Jesuits, called "Black-Robes" by the Indians, were tortured and killed, but eventually significant numbers of Native people accepted Christianity, probably because of the willingness of the French to accept many of their cultural forms and customs and the desire of many Indian women to please their French husbands. With the cooperation of the Indians, the French developed successful trade, trapping, and hunting enterprises and established a network of outposts and forts along the waterways of the territories of New France. As the result of the ways that the French and the Indians integrated their efforts, they also stood in battle together during the long French and Indian War (1755–63) which they fought against the forces of England and New England for control of the territories along what became the Canadian border. In the long term, however, the English forces in the North and the Spanish armies in the South reduced the amount of territory that the French controlled considerably, leaving only Quebec and Louisiana in French hands. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson negotiated the Louisiana Purchase with Napoleon, and the territory became part of the United States.

Like the Spanish, the French also produced a considerable number of histories, personal narratives, and captivity narratives. An exceptional contribution to early American cultural literary history is the 73-volume work, the *Jesuit Relations*, in which the clergy of the Jesuit missions described in great detail their interaction with the Indians. These works were designed to be an official record of the work of the missionaries among the Native people and as a narrative epic of the suffering and heroism of those who saved souls for God and produced wealth for their country.

Literary Production in the English Settlements: The Southern and Middle Colonies

While the French were advancing their interests in Canada, the upper and central mid-west, Florida, and the Gulf coast, and the Spanish were expanding their territories in Mexico, Latin America, the Southwest, and California, the English were waiting and watching the developments in the Americas. Throughout much of the sixteenth century, the English were occupied with domestic political and religious conflicts. In 1534, King Henry VIII's quarrel with the papacy over his desire to marry Anne Boleyn led him to break with the Catholic Church and establish the Church of England under his own leadership. The Protestant Reformation that began in the early sixteenth century was already causing turmoil and persecutions of both Catholics and Protestants throughout Europe. The accession of Henry's eldest and Catholic daughter Mary to the throne in 1553 generated a reign of terror against English Protestants that earned her the designation Bloody Mary. In his 1554 *Book of Martyrs*, Protestant leader John Foxe portrayed the persecutions and their victims so effectively that his work inspired more Protestant rebels. Mary died in 1558 and her Protestant sister Elizabeth became Queen. In her long reign, she brought political stability, peace, and prosperity to England, and her naval forces defeated the Spanish armada, ending Spain's dominance of the North Atlantic. When Elizabeth died in 1603, England was well positioned to begin its own colonization efforts in the Americas.

Encouraged by the government of James I, those seeking to establish colonies in the Americas formed joint stock companies of investors to cover the costs. Because the religious divisions in England became more volatile after Elizabeth's death, people in these companies tended to belong to the same religious groups: the Catholics founded Maryland as a place of religious refuge; the Anglicans established Jamestown and other colonies in Virginia and in the West Indies; a number of different dissenting groups colonized New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; and the radical "Puritan" dissenters populated Massachusetts, Connecticut, and other areas of New England. Because the stock company system required that the members invest in the enterprise, many people, especially in New England and the Middle Colonies, joined as families and expected to have a voice in the affairs of the community. As a result, many settlements tended to develop a sense of autonomy and independence from the control of the English government, a characteristic that would eventually support ideas of

independence, states rights, and a federation of distinctive states and regional cultures. Such traditions would emerge at the time of the American Revolution and its aftermath as key elements in the formation of a new form of government and the construction of an American national identity.

Because of the nature of the climate and the lands of the South, colonies from Virginia to the Caribbean struggled to survive in the early decades of the seventeenth century. In the swampy regions, malaria and fevers were endemic and few families traveled together to settle there. Tobacco became the most important cash crop of the region, and the high degree of cheap labor demanded for tobacco plantations quickly led to the use of indentured laborers and the establishment of slavery as prominent features of the economy and culture of the South. What evolved was a society with a relatively small number of wealthy plantation owners with families supported by a population of white male indentured laborers who worked their way to freedom and African slaves who had little hope of gaining freedom.

Such a hierarchical social structure was quite conducive to the establishment of the arts and literature in the South because the property owners thought of themselves as a kind of aristocracy who possessed the leisure and learning to cultivate the arts and letters. The fact that most of the propertied families in the southern colonies also were Anglican was an advantage for literature because, unlike in New England, there were no religious prohibitions against the creative imagination. As with Catholicism, the Church of England encouraged music and elements of performance as a normal part of spiritual expression. There was a rich religious literature consisting of sermons, theological tracts, hymns, personal diaries, and spiritual autobiographies and there was also a large body of secular writing, such as Samuel Davies's important historical analysis, *The State of Religion among the Protestant Dissenters of Virginia* (1751).

Most of the southern aristocrats were trained in the classics and were well read in the literature of the English and European Renaissance. For this reason and because the planters viewed themselves as being connected to their English contemporaries, they saw the American books that they produced as part of English literary culture, designed to please as well as inform educated English readers in America and in England. Virginia's William Byrd II's *The History of the Dividing Line*, which he began writing in 1728 and was first published in 1841, is a detailed, sophisticated, and witty account of plantation life. Robert Beverly's *The History of the Present State of Virginia* (1705) is a serious account of the exploration and settlement of Virginia that also contains satiric reflections on social foibles. Ebenezer Cook's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1708) is a satiric mock epic that highlights some of the follies and absurdities of life in colonial Maryland, and there is a considerable body of lyric poetry by such fine poets as Benjamin Thompson, Richard Steere, Richard Lewis, Anna Tompson Hayden, Elizabeth Sowle Bradford, and Jane Coleman Turell.

Of the earliest English authors in the South, John Smith continues to command more space in anthologies than his peers because his writings promoted the colonization of America and began what would become a tradition of enticing Europeans with descriptions of the natural abundance of the "New World" and promises of prosperity

that would come to be called the American Dream. His *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) contributed to the increasing numbers migrating to New England from 1630 to the 1690s. In a lively and engaging style, Smith also wrote of his many adventures, the most famous of which is his tale of being held captive by Chief Powhatan whose daughter Pocahontas offered to trade her life for Smith's. While many historians dispute this story, it became a valued myth that illustrates the presumed power of the superior European to fulfill his destiny by a variety of means. Although Smith began his American activities in Virginia, he soon moved to New England, which he named, and he wrote extensively about the region to entice more of the English there. Describing the wildlife and the pleasures of hunting and fishing in a land of such abundance, Smith honed an advertising rhetoric that anticipates modern wordsmiths of Boston and New York who would be selling dreams and land two or three centuries after him:

For gentlemen, what exercise should more delight them then, ranging daily those unknown parts, using fowling and fishing, for hunting and hawking? And yet you shall see the wild hawks give you some pleasure, in seeing them stoop (six or seven after one another) an hour or two together, at the schools of fish in the faire harbors, as those ashore at a fowl. . . . For hunting also, the woods, lakes, rivers afford not only chase sufficient for any that delight in that kind of toil and pleasure, but the beasts to hunt that besides the delicacy of their bodies for food, their skins are so rich as may well recompense thy daily labor with a Captain's pay.

(Lauter, 2002: 193)

Literature in Early New England

Contrary to the less fervent English who settled the Middle and Southern Colonies, the initial settlers in New England were zealous reformers who viewed themselves as exiles forced to flee religious persecution at home. They were Protestants who believed that the Church of England was the product of a corrupt arrangement, often called "The Elizabethan Compromise." In her efforts to maintain political stability, Elizabeth encouraged the Anglican Church to retain the externals of the Catholic liturgy in order to comfort former Catholics who wanted to return to their old faith. The more radical Protestants were appalled because they believed that everything connected to Catholicism was from Satan, and they were outraged that Elizabeth's government ignored or persecuted their clergy and theologians, who sought to return Christianity to the "pure" austere forms of the early Church. Thus, these reformers were scornfully called "Puritans."

These reformers embraced the theology of John Calvin, who developed a strict dualistic either/or logic, and held that God is sovereign and all knowing so everything that has and will happen in the universe has already been fully planned by God. Thus, God has predestined each individual soul to be saved or damned even before birth, and no human possesses the free will to change that fate. All that people can do is to hope that they will receive grace and have a conversion experience bringing them assurance

of their salvation. With Calvin, they also held that the Old Testament contains the words of God and should be read literally and that those who received God's grace and had a valid conversion experience thereby possessed heightened powers to distinguish good from evil and saints from sinners. To insure that the congregation would be pure with only saints among the members, they developed rigorous procedures for deciding who was saved. When a person reported his or her conversion experience, the details had to fit a prescribed pattern that modern scholars have called "the morphology of conversion" (Elliott, 2002: 48,101). With confidence that they were God's Chosen, the Puritans soon gained the reputation in colonies and in England of being narrow persecutors of outsiders and of dissenters within their midst.

Among those who held such beliefs, there was general agreement that the true church of Christ was the individual congregation. A congregation was formed when a group of Saints came to recognize each other as saved and formed a brotherhood of the elect. Then, in a process that anticipates democratic elections, they selected a minister upon whom they could all agree, wrote a church covenant, and worked with their minister to support each other. They were opposed to church hierarchies or synods of bishops meant to guide individual ministers. In a congregational church, the pastor is only beholden to the parishioners, who can dismiss him if they disapproved of his teachings or behavior.

Among the growing body of Congregationalists in England in the late sixteenth century, there were two distinct groups, the Separatists and the non-separating Congregationalists. While the Separatists believed that the Church of England was a lost cause, the less radical group believed that they still belonged to the Church of England and were standing apart from it only until the Church completed its reform and purged itself of the trappings of Catholicism. A group of about 100 Separatists left England in 1608 and traveled to the Netherlands, where they resided in Leyden, known as a haven for religious freedom, until 1620, when they departed on the *Mayflower* to Plymouth, Massachusetts. William Bradford became their governor and during his lifetime wrote his history of the colony, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (written 1630–50; published 1865). In 1630, a second, much larger group of 1,000 non-separating Congregationalists under the leadership of John Winthrop founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony that included Boston, Salem, and several other communities. In spite of some theological differences between these groups, they did work together, especially in relation to the native peoples. They shared the beliefs that they had a sacred mission to preserve the pure Christianity, and they hoped to return to England one day with that pure faith. Initially, both groups felt an obligation to teach their faith to the Indians with the prospect that they might discover some saved Christian saints among them. In 1637, their plans to convert the Indians were temporarily set aside when a dispute over territory led to the Pequot War, involving the English, the Narragansetts, and the Mohegans, against the Pequots. One night in Mystic, Connecticut, the English and the Narragansetts killed 400 Pequots, mostly women and children who were sleeping in their tents. In spite of some resistance by Bradford and the Separatists, the two colonies eventually grew closer together, becoming increasingly diverse and secularized and finally merging in 1692.

Between 1620 and 1649, however, political changes in England greatly affected the American colonies. The numbers of Protestant dissenters in England grew and became more powerful until Civil War erupted in the 1640s resulting in the execution of King Charles I in 1649 and the establishment of a Parliamentary government under Oliver Cromwell. Many New Englanders returned to England during Cromwell's "Protectorate," but they soon discovered that feuds between the Presbyterians, who wanted a hierarchy of bishops and synods to govern the church, and the Congregationalists were tearing the government apart. In 1660, the Protectorate ended when the exiled son of Charles I, who had fled to France, returned to be crowned King Charles II. At that point, the American Puritans knew that they must accept America as their permanent home, but they hoped to remain independent from the new English government. Under Charles II's reign, they did manage to retain a high degree of autonomy, but when the Catholic James II became King in 1685, he appointed a royal governor to Massachusetts and demanded that all the colonies practice religious toleration. Then, with the "Glorious Revolution" of 1689, Parliament appointed the Protestants William, Prince of Orange, of the Netherlands and his wife Mary II (daughter of James) to be the new heads of state with a much stronger role given to Parliament. Under their rule, religious toleration became a permanent feature of the English government at home and in the colonies.

For the flourishing of literature and the arts, New England Puritanism was especially unresponsive. Within Calvinist logic, the only important book was the Bible, and the words of humans were of little consequence except to explicate the truths of the scriptures and instruct others in Calvinist theology. Puritan ministers were taught to use a "plain style" in speaking and writing because to employ ornate or subtle language or wit was to commit the sins of pride and presumption by daring to compete with the artistry of God. During the Puritan Protectorate in England, all of the theaters were closed because indulgence of the imagination and the creation of fictional worlds and characters without a strictly religious purpose were viewed as sinful arousal of dangerous passions. Except for sermons, religious tracts, conversion narratives, and spiritual autobiographies, the only legitimate use of literary expression should be in religious instruction, as in the famous allegorical Puritan work, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by the English Puritan John Bunyan, or the long narrative poem for children, *The Day of Doom* (1662), by the New England poet Michael Wigglesworth.

While the sheer volume of written works produced in New England in the seventeenth century was considerable, most of the texts were of a religious nature. Even the large number of autobiographies and dairies were focused upon the spiritual life and growth of their authors, and histories and captivity narratives were also "spiritualized" in that events and characters are imbued with religious significance so that the reader may perceive the hand of God and the role of his grace in every development. Indeed, because they believed that God conveyed His truths to mankind not only through the Bible but also via acts of nature and historical events, they read the entire world symbolically and explicated everything that might have meaning, such as a sparrow falling to earth or a sudden storm. For example, in her *Narrative of Captivity and Restoration*,

Mary Rowlandson tells of the death of her six-year-old daughter Sarah who was shot during the initial assault but whom she carried for eight days of a forced march. When the child dies, Rowlandson did not tell her captors for several hours for she feared they would discard the body in the forest without a burial. As she lay with Sarah's body all night, she says that she reflected "upon the goodness of God to me, in preserving me in the use of my reason and senses in that distressed time, [so] that I did not use wicked and violent means to end my own miserable life." Through a process of spiritualizing her narrative, she transforms this personal tragedy and her strength in dealing with it into a lesson for others on the power of God's grace.

Of great significance for the Puritans was how they read their own communal errand or mission into the wilderness of New England. Identifying themselves with the Old Testament Hebrews in such works as Edward Johnson's *Wonder-Working Providence* (1654), Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), they identified their leaders with Biblical figures, the Atlantic with the Red Sea, and the American wilderness as the howling deserts of Egypt. In such elaborate associations, the Puritans were drawing upon the system of biblical hermeneutics known as typology. Using typology, the interpreter connects types – people and events of the Old Testament – to their antitypes – events in the life of Christ that fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Even in his satirical attack upon the Puritans, *New English Canaan* (1631), Thomas Morton used typology in order to expose and mock it. Morton critiqued the Puritans' expansion of this system to perceive their own experiences to be antitypes of Biblical types. In sermons and in every other genre, Puritan ministers and authors assumed these parallels between the New England Saints and the biblical Chosen People.

In spite of the religious impediments against the imagination and the arts and the emphasis upon the need that writing serve a didactic purpose, a number of Puritan writers produced works of moving expression and beauty. Those who did so shared with their English counterparts in the middle and southern colonies an artistic alliance with their contemporaries who were part of the English literary renaissance. Remarkably, Anne Bradstreet, one of a small number of English women writers in the seventeenth century, was colonial America's first published poet and remains one of its most admired. Her book, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America* (1650) was published in London and contains a wide range of forms and subjects that demonstrate her remarkable intelligence, wit, and learning. While most of her poems focus upon religious subjects, many are personal, dealing with family, love, marriage, and everyday life. Some of her works even express discontent with her position as a Puritan woman and with the unwillingness of the Puritan patriarchy to acknowledge that women could be as intelligent and as clever as men. Although she was not an outspoken reformer like Anne Hutchinson, who suffered excommunication and exile for challenging the Puritan clergy in the 1630s, Bradstreet, by her life and achievements, helped to undermine false assumptions about women that were widely shared in her community.

Another surprising literary talent is Reverend Edward Taylor, who spent much of his life writing poetry that demonstrated that art was not antithetical to religion but who knew that his fellow clergy and many of the members of his own congregation would

not agree. Few if any of his contemporaries ever read his poems and his manuscripts remained undiscovered until 1939. Born in England, Taylor studied at Cambridge before coming to America and completing his degree at Harvard. He accepted a call to be the minister in remote Westfield, Massachusetts, where he remained until his death in 1729. He was a devout, conservative Puritan who spoke out and wrote against the liberalizing tendencies that began in the 1680s. His rich and complex poetry, however, reveals him to have been strongly influenced by the English Renaissance and most likely by the Metaphysical poets such as John Donne and George Herbert. Taylor used typology for poetic as well as religious purposes. Like the Metaphysical poets in England, he had a delightful wit and clearly took pleasure in his play with language. With Bradstreet, Taylor remains one of the most read and studied of early American writers.

With the tragic events of the Salem Witchcraft trials in 1692 followed by years of confessions of regret by church and community leaders and payments of compensation to the families of the victims, Puritanism suffered a fatal blow that put an end to what was one of the most influential religious movements in the history of colonial America and the United States. Although the extraordinary Puritan theologian, Jonathan Edwards and the remarkable religious revivals of the First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s briefly gave Calvinism new life, the colonies had become religiously, politically, and ethnically diverse, and the growing influence of Enlightenment thought would lead the educated classes to perceive Mankind and Nature, rather than God, to be the subjects of serious thought and writing.

Because the Puritans had come to identify their position in the world as the “City on a Hill,” in John Winthrop’s resonant phrase, a model for all to follow, and because they came to identify that mythical city with America as a geographical place, the Puritans began to shape some key components of what came to be called “American identity.” One key feature of that identity remains a tendency to think in terms of either/or options and to seek the “bottom line” – are we damned or saved? Another key idea that Calvin developed was that every individual was given a material and spiritual calling in life, and the person had to search his or her heart to discover these. For one who receives grace and has the conversion experience, the spiritual calling is salvation, and for the elected saint, the temporal calling was linked to the spiritual. Thus, the Puritans quickly came to accept the notion that a member of the elect would also be a serious, law-abiding, sober, dedicated, hard worker who would likely be successful in a material calling. Since God predetermined all things, it only makes sense, they reasoned, that the elect were not meant to be failures in the world. For these reasons, many scholars, most notably Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1920), have recognized that this form of Protestantism was quite conducive to the rise of capitalism and that the leap is short from the Reverend Cotton Mather’s emphasis on “doing good” to Benjamin Franklin’s advice to rise early and “be healthy, wealthy, and wise.” Many features of Puritanism, such as Bradford’s emphasis upon private rather than communal plots of land and Winthrop’s treatise on democratic governance, came to be seen in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as elements of American identity.

Enlightenment, Revolution, and the First Professional Writers

The eighteenth century brought many changes to the colonies such as a dramatic increase in the population, the establishment of an extensive system of slavery, a major war involving the French and the Indians against the English, and the political turmoil of the 1760s and early 1770s that would lead to the Revolutionary War and the founding of the United States. During these decades, the Enlightenment ushered in many important intellectual developments, and the philosophical works of John Locke, Sir Isaac Newton, René Descartes, and others, shifted the focus of thought from theology and religion to reason and science. The Enlightenment, sometimes called the Augustan Age, also inspired Neoclassicism, and the young men in the universities in the 1770s and 1780s enthusiastically embraced classical traditions. More liberal religious and political ideas began to emerge that would shape the thinking of men like Franklin, Jefferson, and Thomas Paine and women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Mercy Warren Otis, Judith Sargent Murray, and Abigail Adams. American literature became much more imitative of English literature of the same period. The poetry of Alexander Pope, the essays of Addison and Steele, the plays of Shakespeare and of the Restoration dramatists, and eventually the fiction of Fielding and Richardson were widely read and performed in the colonies and their influences were evident in the works of American writers. While Franklin was an original and was respected abroad for his writing as well as for his inventions and his key leadership during and after the Revolution, most of the writers between 1720 and 1780 who are anthologized today were minor figures, with the other exceptions being Jefferson, Paine, and John Adams. With the reassessment that has come about in the last two decades, a number of previously obscure authors have come to the center of the literary study, such as the slave author Phillis Wheatly, William Bartram, Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur, and Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa), whose slave narrative, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, is the most important work of its kind before the nineteenth century.

During the years after the Revolution, there was a significant rise in literacy that accompanied the development of print culture, and the first daily newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Packet*, appeared in 1784. With so much information to be had and so many issues being debated, people felt that they needed to read in order to make sensible political and economic decisions. Magazines began to be published in greater numbers while broadsides and newspaper editorials appeared regularly. Following the classical tradition, many writers used pseudonyms, as did James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton, the writers of *The Federalist* (1787–8).

The first authors in the new Republic who thought of themselves as entering the career of letters were groups of young men who had attended university in the early 1770s. While a generation earlier these young men would have become religious ministers, it was evident that religion was no longer at the center of intellectual life

and that writing related to politics and contemporary life would be the wave of the future. They imagined that through the mighty pen they could possess a different form of power available in the growing urban centers where intellectuals met and exchanged ideas and manuscripts, as Alexander Pope and his colleagues in London had done decades earlier. When the young novelist and essayist Charles Brockden Brown of Philadelphia visited his New York friend Elihu Hubbard Smith, a medical student with literary talent and radical philosophical views, Smith introduced him to members of the Friendly Club, a writers' group that included the playwright William Dunlap. Brown then became determined not to become a lawyer, but to dedicate his career to literature. In Philadelphia, Brown attended the *Belles Lettres Club* where he shared his work with other writers, and he went on to publish an extraordinary series of novels in the 1790s that in many ways forecast the literary techniques and themes that later appear in the works of Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. Joel Barlow of Hartford, Connecticut, joined with a group of young authors, later called the "Connecticut Wits," to produce a series of newspaper articles collected under the title of *The Anarchiad* to celebrate the triumph of political chaos and to try to awaken the politicians to exercise more control and good sense. Later he published perhaps the best comic poem written in the United States before the 1880s, *The Hasty Pudding* (1796), as well as two major epic poems and many political essays. Barlow moved to France in 1788, became close friends with the radical thinkers Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, and was made an honorary French citizen in 1793. While these authors and others, such as the poet Philip Freneau and novelist Hugh Henry Brackenridge, were being productive but struggling to find an audience, the first women of letters in the United States were reaching large numbers of readers with novels of sentiment concerned with domestic life and with moral issues.

The most successful of the women novelists of the era were Susanna Haswell Rowson and Hannah Webster Foster. Born in England, Rowson moved to America when she was five and grew up in Nantasket, Massachusetts. In 1778, she and her father returned to London where she married William Rowson. As William's business was failing, Susanna began to write poetry and fiction including *Charlotte Temple* (1794), the first American best seller. It is a heart-rending tale of a young English woman who is seduced by a villain, taken to America, becomes pregnant, and is abandoned to die. Rowson returned to the United States with her husband and, in the second half of her life, she had a career on the stage as an actress, dancer, and musician. Forty editions of *Charlotte Temple* were published in Rowson's lifetime. Ironically, because of the lack of international copyright laws, she derived little in royalties from the novel and had to depend upon her own stage performances of it as her best source of income. Following Rowson's example, Hannah Webster Foster published *The Coquette* in 1797. It, too, is a sentimental novel that was made up of 74 letters telling the story of a spirited young woman who makes a serious mistake that leads to her demise. It also was a best seller and with *Charlotte Temple* is one of the two most successful novels in the United States before 1800.

A Nation and a National Literature Matures

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the United States underwent several crises of survival and identity. The war of 1812 nearly resulted in the return of the country to British control. The rapid increase of slavery in the South gave rise to heated debates and to the beginning of the Abolitionist movement in the North that would eventually help to bring about the Civil War. The election of southerner Andrew Jackson as President in 1826 ushered in major changes in American politics. In addition to supporting slavery and states' rights, Jackson's administration passed the Indian Removal Act in 1830 that resulted in the forced relocation of thousands of people to the western territories and generated the Indian Wars that continued throughout the century. The fashioning of what has been called "Jacksonian rhetoric" generated such popular ideas as "Manifest Destiny" that rationalized the annexation of northern Mexico, the creation of Texas, and the Mexican War in 1848 that brought under the control of the United States 500,000 square miles, including what is now New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. Just as they opposed slavery, many intellectuals and artists of the Northeast opposed the Mexican War, and the rise of radical opposition to many of Jackson's policies helped to generate the women's rights movement and a wide array of utopian communities. Violence and turmoil were common in these decades as anger in the urban centers over poverty, injustice, and unfair labor practices provoked riots, and the hopelessness and rage of slavery produced slave revolts. Such events heightened public awareness of the growing gap between the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and the realities of daily life.

With international copyright laws in place, American authors such as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe, found audiences for their works at home and abroad. American literature began to become international with Irving spending 17 years in Europe and Cooper spending seven there, and this trans-Atlantic dimension of American writing continued with Hawthorne, who spent seven years in England and Italy, and with Melville, a world traveler. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and other members of the Transcendentalist movement were well acquainted with members of the Romantic movement in Europe, and many of the other women writers in the United States, such as Lydia Maria Child, Lydia Sigourney, Susan Warner, Fanny Fern, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, were read and toasted in England and on the continent. There was a robust regional literature within the United States led by popular writers of the South and Southwest such as Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Henry Clay Lewis, and George Washington Harris while the authors of another localized genre, the slave narrative, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, generated considerable interest at home and abroad. Thus, by the 1850s, it could no longer be said that "no one reads an American book," for writers of the United States had established themselves solidly within world literature, and those who would follow in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, such as Henry James, Mark Twain, and Emily Dickinson, would build upon that foundation.

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Politics, Sentiment, and Literature in Nineteenth-Century America

John Carlos Rowe

Nineteenth-century abolition and the women's rights movement linked politics and sentiment in ways that powerfully transformed culture's role in US social movements. The famous anecdote about President Lincoln greeting Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1863 as "the little lady who made this big war" illustrates the degree to which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was understood in its own time as a vital political force (Douglas, 1981: 19). Nathaniel Hawthorne complained resentfully about the "damn'd mob of scribbling women" whose popularity and influence greatly exceeded his own (Hawthorne to William Ticknor, January 1855, in Ticknor, 1913: 141). His most important literary heir, Henry James, would continue this habit of male complaint about women writers and artists, even though James built his literary reputation in large part on his use of sentimental conventions to attract women readers.¹ The nineteenth-century cult of domesticity, the myth of the "angel in the house," and the bourgeois commitment to "separate spheres" for men (public) and women (private) did not fully regulate the political influence of sentiment and feeling identified with women, whom Ralph Waldo Emerson termed "the civilizers of mankind" ("Woman," in Emerson, 2003: 247).

Prior to the important cultural recovery work of second-wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars often treated sentimental literature as part of mass culture, which relied on prevailing social conventions. Sentimental and domestic romances, the plantation romance, melodrama in theater, and so-called "graveyard" verse addressed a wide range of nineteenth-century social problems: slavery, women's rights, alcoholism, conflict with Native Americans, infant mortality, crises of religious faith in the face of scientific progress, and urbanization. Yet for many scholars, these mass cultural forms addressed these problems only to rationalize them within the framework of existing social values. Many "plantation romances," like John Pendleton Kennedy's sketches of rural life in Virginia, *Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832), reinforced myths of happy slaves, the extended "family" on the plantation, the nobility of the Southern gentleman, and the charm of the Southern belle. John Augustus Stone's

Metamora, or the Last of the Wampanoags (1829), is a romantic tragedy about the English defeat of King Philip (or Chief Metamora) in King Philip's War (1675–6). Although Stone's play represents the English as unscrupulous and unjust, it also heralds the promise of the US nation and the "inevitable" disappearance of Native Americans.

By far the most important producers of sentimental literature in the nineteenth century were women authors. In *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), Ann Douglas argues that the cult of sentimentalism to which many women writers and intellectuals contributed helped maintain women's status as second-class citizens in nineteenth-century America. This ideological work is even more remarkable for Douglas because it was done at a time in which social and political conditions for women were changing dramatically. Sentimental literature thus discouraged progressive movements, she argues, including women's rights and abolition. Although Douglas's thesis has been challenged by many scholars, it still has considerable validity for a wide range of sentimental works by women writers following politically conservative agendas. Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) charts Ellen Montgomery's drudgery working as a virtual servant for her aunt in upstate New York, offering her redemption only through Presbyterianism and her engagement to the aspiring minister John Dolan. Transported almost magically from her Aunt Moody's infernal farm in New York to her aristocratic relatives' Edinburgh mansion at the end of the novel, the 14-year-old Ellen is a willing convert both to Scottish Presbyterianism and spiritual love (Warner, 1987: 277). Warner's political conservatism is certainly complex, because her advocacy of "New School" Presbyterianism belongs to a forgotten chapter in nineteenth-century American Christianity, but her values include staunch patriotism, a missionary zeal to spread her faith, and a defense of the prevailing gender hierarchies of patriarchal America (Rowe, 2003b). Written in the midst of heated public debates over slavery, *The Wide, Wide World* makes no mention of slavery or abolition. Although brief references are made to "Indians," they are treated by the characters as part of a past era. Warner, who along with her sister tutored military cadets at West Point, advocates social activism only through her Church, defending help for others only insofar as it is accompanied by their conversion.

Since the 1980s, Douglas's thesis in *The Feminization of American Culture* has been challenged by many scholars, notably Jane Tompkins, who in *Sensational Designs* (1985) argues that we have treated sentimental literature reductively, often because of its close identification with women writers (1985: ix–xix). Rereading Harriet Beecher Stowe's and Susan Warner's sentimental romances in response to the male canonical authors Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and James Fenimore Cooper, Tompkins accomplishes two important tasks. First, she shows us how profoundly sentimental those canonical male writers are; second, she makes a strong case that Stowe and Warner were more self-conscious regarding the political and social purposes of their works than Brown, Hawthorne, and Cooper (1985: 122–86). What Tompkins terms "the Other American Renaissance" refers to the enormous body of sentimental literature, much of it written by women, we need to reread in order to understand its socially critical and reformist purposes (1985: 147). Tompkins interprets sentimental

romances in order to show how domestic privacy often shapes public policy, affective experience informs rational understanding, and religious belief structures everyday life and social attitudes. Such an interpretive approach is obviously feminist, insofar as it breaks down gendered divisions crucial to nineteenth-century American patriarchy. To the degree that sentimental literature can be shown to do such work, then it does indeed anticipate second-wave feminist demands for the recognition of women's domestic labor, equal pay and equal opportunities in the workplace, civil rights broadened to include control over one's own body, and a host of related political issues we identify today with the activism of 1960s feminism, the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment, and such organizations as the National Organization of Women.

As I have already suggested, the case for Warner as a social activist must be understood within the politics of her Presbyterianism, which was deeply conservative and committed to missionary projects that contributed to Euroamerican imperialism. Tompkins's reinterpretation of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an aesthetic effort to contribute to the politics of abolition is far less controversial, because it is self-evidently supported by the book's enormous popularity and its nineteenth-century reputation as a major contribution to the fight against slavery. Tompkins also reminds us that nineteenth-century women's rights' activists were among the most vigorous abolitionists, identifying their own situation with the more extreme plight of African-American slaves. Frederick Douglass moved to Rochester, New York, to establish his abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, at least in part because he knew he would be welcomed by the strong women's rights' activists and abolitionists in that city (McFeely, 1991: 148, 266). Indeed, Douglass's journalism in *The North Star* often deals with women's rights, a cause he supported as vigorously as abolition (Rowe, 1997: 114–15).

Stowe's feminine characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are the primary critics of and activists against slavery, but it is by no means clear that Stowe was a nineteenth-century women's rights' activist. Ann Douglas contends that "Stowe was not a declared feminist, although the link between antislavery and the women's movement was a vital one" (Douglas, 1981: 13). Tompkins contends that Stowe's romance consistently advocates maternal domesticity, culminating in the fictional portrait of the Quaker abolitionist, Rachel Halliday, as the figure of "God in human form," the "millenarian counterpart of little Eva," whose sacrificial death has often been understood as Christ-like (Tompkins, 1985: 142). Both Douglas and Tompkins agree, however, that Stowe's feminine characters are inspired by their feelings for others and compelled to action by a sympathy often lacking in the male characters. The source of this anti-slavery sensibility is Christian faith, which in its proper form finds every sort of subjection abhorrent, except our devotion to a compassionate God. Much of Stowe's abolitionist outrage in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is directed at the perversion of Christianity under slavery, which twisted the Bible into justifying racial discrimination and the white exploitation of African-Americans.

Stowe may stress the power of religious sensibility in her feminine characters, but there are numerous male characters who share their passion. Remembered primarily for his docility, Uncle Tom is himself "a sort of patriarch in religious matters, in the

neighborhood,” whose morality is conveyed to others by his work “as a sort of minister among them” and who “especially excelled” in “prayer” (Stowe, 1981: 79). Uncle Tom is effective in bringing together the African-American community, forbidden in many Southern states to assemble even for religious services after Nat Turner’s Southampton Rebellion in 1831 (Rowe, 1997: 135). Anti-slavery “feeling,” like Christian compassion for our fellow man, is not restricted by Stowe to women, but it derives from understanding that exceeds impersonal “reasoning.” As Senator John Bird’s wife, Mary, tells him in her effort to convince him of the sins of slavery: “I hate reasoning, John, – especially reasoning on such subjects. There’s a way you political folks have of coming round and round a plain right thing; and you don’t believe in it yourselves, when it comes to practice. I know *you* well enough, John. You don’t believe it’s right any more than I do; and you wouldn’t do it any sooner than I” (Stowe, 1981: 145). Although Mary claims to have learned these lessons from reading the Bible, where she learns she “must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the desolate,” it is not only faith to which she appeals in her arguments with her husband but also *practical reason* as opposed to the abstractions and sophistry Southern slaveowners used to rationalize slavery (Stowe, 1981: 144).

In 1853, Stowe published *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, providing documentary evidence in support of her fictional representations of the horrors suffered by African-Americans under slavery (Gossett, 1985: 285). Stowe wanted to show that fantasy belonged less to her sentimental romance than to the elaborate rationalizations by which Southern slaveowners continued to justify their inhuman practices. Answering critics who had accused her of exaggerating African-American living conditions under slavery, she also provided the materials for a new novel, *Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, which she published in 1856. Neglected until recently by scholars, *Dred* offers an important variation on nineteenth-century sentimental romances, especially those we identify with women authors. The hero of the narrative is the runaway slave, Dred, who has organized a maroon community in the Great Dismal Swamp and plans a rebellion against slavery. Physically large and powerful, Dred is dedicated to a “rigid austerity [in] his life” and displays a “profound contempt” for “all animal comforts” (Stowe, 1856: II, 274). Like Nat Turner, Dred speaks in the millenarian and apocalyptic tones of the Bible. In fact, his prophetic speech and witnessing are “drawn verbatim or almost verbatim from the Bible” (Davis, 1999: 118). But his visionary qualities are not used to represent him as a mad revolutionary; he exemplifies Christian charity and obeys the very “natural laws” advocated by American Transcendentalists as well as anti-slavery legal theorists. Dred is a sentimental hero who also embodies the ethical vision and “higher laws” of the anti-slavery movement. Arguably the first African-American hero in white American literature, Dred teaches us how nineteenth-century sentimentalism crossed established gender and racial boundaries (Rowe, 2002: 48).

Not only has the close identification of “sentiment” with the politics of women’s liberation caused us to ignore its significance across gender lines, it has also caused us to neglect the different uses of sentiment by women from different classes, regions, and ethnicities. In the 1970s, women of color, especially those associated with the Black

Arts Movement, challenged white feminist sentimentalism as representative of only one segment of women's culture: that of white, middle-class women with the leisure and privilege to indulge sentimental fantasies. Working women, especially of color, felt excluded from such a "culture of sentiment." The rediscovery and republication in the 1970s of important literary works by nineteenth-century women of color, such as Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), was motivated in part by the scholarly desire for a more diverse representation of women's experiences. Hazel Carby, Valerie Smith, and other scholars argue that Jacobs relied on the sentimental tradition in her fictional characterization of Linda Brent, in order to draw on the sympathies of white, Northern, middle-class women and redirect those feelings to the cause of Abolition (Carby, 1987; Smith, 1987). Harriet Wilson takes a different approach, criticizing directly Northern white women for their own contributions to slavery and racism, as the complete title of her narrative suggests: *Our Nig, or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black in a Two-Story White House, Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*. Stripping away the Northern abolitionists' sentimental illusions about their philanthropy regarding Southern slaves, Wilson also rejects the idea there are "natural" bonds linking white women with their African-American sisters. Just as some anti-slavery advocates insisted that Southern slavery survived thanks to Northern patronage of its economic products, so Wilson argued that slavery persisted in part due to the deep-seated racism of even the most "liberal" white Northerners.

Conventional sentimental romances often deal with women threatened with sexual victimization, only to be saved from such harassment by loving partners offering marriage, respectability, and social status. In Jacobs's narrative, the African-American slave Linda Brent must repeatedly fend off the sexual advances of her master, Dr. Flint. Although the reader might expect his wife to be Linda's savior, Mrs. Flint's jealousy of Linda drives her to violent behavior toward her servant. Caught between an evil master and jealous mistress, Linda attempts to escape by allowing another white man, Mr. Sands, to impregnate her. The rhetoric Jacobs employs to represent Linda's traumatic choice of Sands over Flint is superficially sentimental, but her circumstances hardly belong to the style or genre: "Of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my children well supported; and in this case, I felt confident I should obtain the boon. I also felt quite sure that they would be made free . . . I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (Jacobs, 1987: 55–6).

Linda Brent's decision does not prevent Dr. Flint from continuing to harass her, and she must pretend to become a fugitive slave while remaining in hiding in her grandmother's house so she can remain close to her children. Her terrible situation goes far beyond the melodramas faced by most other protagonists in nineteenth-century sentimental romances. Threatened every day with rape by Dr. Flint and physical violence from his wife, she "surrenders" to Mr. Sands, only to discover that her benefactor does

not free their children and that her diabolical master continues to pursue her. Even in this terrible situation, the young Linda Brent feels guilty, having violated codes of white, middle-class feminine conduct, but her sense of humiliation only underscores how profoundly inappropriate such values are for an African-American woman under the domination of Southern slavery. At the very end of *Incidents*, Linda and her children find some tenuous stability in the North, but unlike other heroines of sentimental romances Linda chooses *not* to marry, preferring the modest control she can exercise as a single mother over her small family. Employing effectively the rhetoric of sentimentalism, Harriet Jacobs reminds her readers that different standards must apply to African-American women faced with regular rape by their white masters and the hostility of their vindictive white mistresses.

Crossing the gender lines in African-American literature of the period, we can interpret Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) as another influential revision of sentimental conventions. Witnessing his Aunt Hester whipped by her jealous overseer, experiencing his white mistress, Sophia Auld, changed by slavery from compassionate woman to tyrannical mistress, and recalling the suffering of his mother under slavery, the young Douglass draws much of his anti-slavery passion from his sympathetic identification with women. Sentimentality also informs crucial episodes in his abolitionist education. His fight with Covey is justly celebrated as the moment in which the slave recognizes he can and should rebel against tyranny, but the fight itself can be understood as "the turning-point in my career as a slave" only if we interpret it sentimentally (Douglass, 1982: 103). In strictly historical terms, any such physical conflict between an individual slave and his master would have likely resulted in the brutal punishment, if not death, of the slave. Douglass explains that "Mr. Covey enjoyed the most unbounded reputation for being a first-rate overseer and negro-breaker," so had Covey "sent me – a boy about sixteen years old – to the public whipping post, his reputation would have been lost; so, to save his reputation, he suffered me to go unpunished" (1982: 114). Douglass's explanation of how he escaped punishment is improbable; the risk of the master allowing a rebellious slave to go unpunished was far greater than any loss of "reputation." But Douglass offers this symbolic rebellion to invoke the passion for resistance among other African-Americans. In a crucial symbolic action in the *Narrative*, Douglass rebels rhetorically – that is, sentimentally – when he knows that individual resistance would most likely have led to death.

If we reconsider literature's symbolic actions as appealing to emotions and depending on affective identifications with others, then perhaps all literature is "sentimental." Of course, literature also relies on cognitive and rational processes, including the mere act of literacy itself, which may well be fundamental to the most elementary acts of thought. Beyond this broad speculation about literature, we might also argue that the prevailing romantic idealist tenor of much nineteenth-century American literature contributed to its particular reliance on sentimentalism, sensibility, and other extrarational modes of understanding. Although profoundly indebted to Enlightenment philosophy, especially the tradition culminating in Immanuel Kant's monumental

analysis of human reason, American Transcendentalism gives priority to a wide range of affective and emotional modes of understanding. Henry David Thoreau's "Higher Laws" subordinate scientific knowledge to poetic intuition, in which the wholeness of Nature can be perceived (Thoreau, 1985: 495). In Emerson's metaphysical hierarchy, "Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts. Nature is the symbol of spirit" (Emerson, *Nature*, in 2003: 33). Poets and their "genius" are thus needed to apprehend this spiritual ecology, and the resulting visionary experience is often manifestly sentimental, even gothic, as in Emerson's famous conception of himself as a "transparent eyeball" in *Nature* (1831): "Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God" (2003: 26).

Such visionary moments in Emerson and Thoreau have rarely, if ever, been described as "sentimental," in part because these writers took such pains to distinguish their ideas from those of their feminine contemporaries, especially popular writers like Stowe, Warner, and Lydia Maria Child. In "Woman" (1855), Emerson identifies "civilization" with "the power of good women," but he does so primarily to trivialize their cultural contributions as: "Society, conversation, decorum, flowers, dances, colors, forms" (Emerson, 2003: 247, 248). Emerson does not include serious literature and art in this list, reserving their special genius for men, but the proximity of his own vocation with the "oracular" powers of women suggests how profoundly anxious nineteenth-century American males were regarding the growing cultural and political power of women. Artists like Emerson, Hawthorne, and James tried to distance themselves from feminine sentimentalism, because they feared it was inferior to reason. Yet the prevailing romantic idealism we identify with Emerson, Thoreau, and such romantic ironists as Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville was based on the assumption that the rational philosophy inherited from the Enlightenment was flawed by its neglect of "sensibility."

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft argued convincingly that women should be "more rationally educated" and that "reason" itself should be expanded to include intuition and the imagination as integral faculties of "ratiocination" (Wollstonecraft, 1992: 397, 395). Emerson and Hawthorne's versions of romantic idealism were thus very much in keeping with arguments offered by women's rights activists, many of whom identified themselves with the progressive politics of international romanticism. In practice, however, Emerson and Hawthorne adopted meliorist positions, acknowledging women's rights primarily in abstract terms but resisting appeals for specific political and social changes, such as those made by the first national women's congress held at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. In Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Hester Prynne is explicitly modeled on the historical figure, Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643), the so-called "Antinomian" religious radical who was banished from the Bay Colony by Governor Winthrop in 1638 for her advocacy of the individual's direct intuition of God's grace. In the seventeenth-century Puritan theocracy of Massachusetts, Hutchinson's religious views profoundly threatened the authority of the ministry and thus of religious-based government. Hawthorne

identifies Hester with Hutchinson, but reminds us that as a mother Hester has avoided Hutchinson's more public destiny: "Yet, had little Pearl never come to her from the spiritual world, it might have been far otherwise. Then, she might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Anne Hutchinson, as the foundress of a religious sect . . . She might, and not improbably would, have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period, for attempting to undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment. But, in the education of her child, the mother's enthusiasm of thought had something to wreak itself upon" (Hawthorne, 1962: 158). Women may be justified in calling for social and political changes, Hawthorne suggests, but they should reconsider the social importance of their traditional work as mothers: "Indeed, the same dark question often arose in her mind, with reference to the whole race of womanhood. Was existence worth accepting, even to the happiest among them? . . . As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position" (1962: 159). Granting Hester a revolutionary perspective, Hawthorne makes her work seem so impossible, even *unnatural*, as to be beyond her powers: "A woman never overcomes these problems by any exercise of thought. They are not to be solved, or only in one way. If her heart chance to come uppermost, they vanish" (1962: 159). Lapsing back into motherhood and sentiment, Hester ultimately rejects the public sphere Anne Hutchinson did in fact enter and concludes by living vicariously through her daughter, Pearl, and her public service as a nurse.

Of course, there were other American Transcendentalists who considered its romantic philosophy to be essentially committed to women's rights and the universal human rights invoked by abolitionists. Margaret Fuller (1810–50) missed the Seneca Falls Convention only because she was in Europe reporting on the populist revolutions transforming its political map, but her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) is a major testament to the ways sensibility might enlarge reason as women assumed more central roles in culture, politics, and society. A committed political activist often parodied by male transcendentalist colleagues, such as Emerson and Hawthorne, and their heirs, including Henry James, Fuller visited women prisoners in Sing Sing Penitentiary (1844), conducted progressive classes for women in Boston (which she termed "conversations"), and participated with her husband, Marchese Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, in the republican revolution against the French and the Papacy during the 1848 Italian Risorgimento (Rowe, 2003a: 13–16). Displaying Fuller's extensive knowledge of literary and political history and her fluency in several languages (Greek, Latin, German, French, and Italian), *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* stresses the need for women's education and Wollstonecraft's ideal of reason. William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft are for Fuller partners in a marriage notable for its "intellectual companionship" (Fuller, 2003: 340) and thus the "sign of a new era," which indicates an "aspiration of soul, of energy of mind, seeking clearness and freedom" (2003: 344). To be sure, their equality is based more on shared intellectual commitments than sexual partnership, so that "the champion of the Rights of Woman found, in Godwin, one who would plead

that cause like a brother,” echoing a prevalent romantic notion that the ideal relationship between men and women was that of brother and sister.²

Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is a scholarly work, relying at times excessively on Latinate prose and multilingual allusions, in order to demonstrate that an educated woman can indeed compete successfully with her male contemporaries. Yet the reason to which Fuller appeals is broadened to include religious forms of knowledge, the non-European epistemologies of Native Americans and other non-Western peoples, and mythic “truth.” Fuller develops in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* “a body of female archetypes upon which women can draw imaginatively . . . in hopes of reclaiming for women the sense of power that Christian culture has largely denied them. Would you rather be a powerful and even terrifying goddess – Isis, Demeter, Minerva, Artemis, Cybele? Or a meek and Christian wife . . . ?” (Packer, 1995: 534). In turns advocating direct legal and political reforms, supplemented by changes occasioned more subtly by formal education and private study, Fuller adapted romantic idealist philosophy to the causes of women’s rights, abolition, and other populist movements around the world. Reintegrating reason and feeling, mind and emotions, she succeeded in separating these two aspects of our understanding from prevailing gender stereotypes. In these respects, she went beyond Wollstonecraft’s calls for the rational education of women to appeal for the reeducation of men as well.

Nineteenth-century male artists and intellectuals were not simply reinforcing sexist stereotypes; they were also responding complexly to their marginalization by the progressive, materialist ideology of Jacksonian America. Hawthorne’s resentment of women writers was undoubtedly driven in part by his inability to make a decent living as a writer. Industrialization and urbanization in the first half of the nineteenth century helped expand the markets and audiences for cultural productions, but they also created new hierarchies in which cultural work was perceived as inconsequential, frivolous, even feminine. Homosexuality may not have become a legal category in Europe and the US until after the passage of Henry Labouchère’s Criminal Law Amendment Act in England in 1885, but masculine anxieties regarding the instability of male and female identities and values were very evident in the first half of nineteenth-century America (Derrick, 1997: 35–65). Today we read the scene of Dr. Roger Chillingworth hovering demonically over the sleeping Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* as charged with homoerotic significance, as well as melodramatic sentiment (1962: 132–3). For the mid-nineteenth-century reader, the scene must have represented the struggle between religion and science for social authority. Tossed between her secret lover, Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, and her husband, Dr. Roger Chillingworth, Hester Prynne exemplifies not only feminine subjection in patriarchal America but also the crisis of masculine agency. Hawthorne struggles as an imaginative author to claim some perspective on the problems besetting these men of faith and science. In a similar vein, Emerson claims in “The Poet” (1844) that the poet perceives higher truths than the scientist or religious visionary and that “poets are thus liberating gods” (2003: 206). Their claims, shared by many other American romantics, appear exaggerated in nineteenth-century middle-class

America, leaving us with a sense of their delusions of grandeur amid other, more powerful forces.

The ambivalent situation of many male intellectuals may help explain why they would deny their reliance on the sentimentalism, melodrama, and sensibility central to nineteenth-century women's cultural work. Even today, scholars are reluctant to acknowledge the depth of masculine sentimentalism in canonical American literature. Yet Edgar Allan Poe's gothic fiction is incomprehensible apart from sentimental culture. His celebrated character C. Auguste Dupin, master of "ratiocination" and forerunner of the modern detective, is not really a man of science but a canny interpreter of human psychology and thus of irrational impulses and feelings. Herman Melville's fiction turns repeatedly on close personal relations – Tommo and Toby in *Typee* (1846), Ishmael and Queequeg in *Moby-Dick* (1851), Pierre and his half-sister, Isabel, in *Pierre* (1852) – that substitute friendship and love as higher social ties than those established by religious orthodoxy, scientific fact, and business pragmatism. As the previous examples suggest, Melville's characters' close personal relations are usually homosocial, understandably given his attention to the masculine communities of sea-faring, and they suggest significant parallels with the sentimentalism more traditionally identified with women's popular romances. As I have already suggested, Hawthorne's fiction is thoroughly sentimental, competing with women romancers by creating feminine heroines whose fates depend on star-crossed love: Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Phoebe Pyncheon in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), the tragic Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Miriam and her masculine double, Donatello, in *The Marble Faun* (1860).

African-American and other ethnic minorities in nineteenth-century America often drew upon white feminine sentimentalism both to attract audiences and thereby appeal for social reforms. As I have already suggested, they often changed sentimental literary conventions, even as they acknowledged their sources. John Rollin Ridge's (Yellow Bird's) popular novel, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854), criticizes the persecution of Mexicans and other ethnic minorities in California following the Mexican-American War. The novel is sensational, playing upon popular fears of bandits and the general anarchy in California in transition from Mexican to US rule, and it draws on stereotypes of cruel highwaymen, voluptuous Mexican women, abject Chinese, and victimized white women. It also draws quite explicitly on Transcendentalist conventions, as in the poem included in the novel, "Mount Shasta, Seen from a Distance" (Ridge, 1955: 23–5). Like Frederick Douglass, many nineteenth-century African-American male writers relied on melodrama, often rooted in solid fact, to expose the evils of slavery, especially the exploitation of African-American women. William Wells Brown's *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853) culminates with the tragic mulatta, Clotel, praying to God as she leaps from a bridge over the Potomac to escape slave hunters: "Thus died Clotel, the daughter of Thomas Jefferson, a president of the United States; a man distinguished as the author of the Declaration of Independence, and one of the first statesmen of that country" (Brown, 2000: 207).

How, then, do we explain the studious effort of white, middle-class male writers to distance themselves from the politically influential and aesthetically successful

conventions of literary sentimentalism? In addition, how do we explain scholarly traditions that have long *accepted* the distinction made by such male writers of their work from that of their feminine and minority contemporaries? The answer lies not simply in the defensive sexism of many white, middle-class authors, although this factor cannot be ignored. It is compounded by the strategic avoidance of direct political commitments by many of these writers, who have long been identified with a “liberal tradition” in which “serious” art is assumed to transcend particular social and political interests. In the late nineteenth century, various forms of aestheticism emerged that would culminate in the avant-garde literary and visual experiments we identify today with cultural modernism. In Germany, Friedrich Nietzsche claimed in “Truth and Falsity in the Ultramoral Sense” (1873) that “reason” is an illusion intended primarily for the “preservation of the individual” and that the “chief power” of the human intellect is “this art of dissimulation,” or lying (1992: 634). In England, Oscar Wilde argued in “The Decay of Lying” (1889) that only the artist recognizes the inherent fictionality of all experience and thus the relativity of virtually every political cause (Wilde, 1992: 658). Also in England, the American author Henry James would argue less radically than Nietzsche and Wilde but in a similar vein that the “Art of Fiction” (1884) should not be concerned with the moral and political didacticism of the romance but with simulating “the illusion of reality.”³

Strongly influenced by Emerson and Hawthorne, among other Transcendentalists who were friends of his father, Henry James, Sr. (himself a minor Transcendentalist), James responds critically to the appeal by his contemporary, Walter Besant in “Fiction as One of the Fine Arts” (1883), for a return to moral didacticism and historically credible realism in literature. Yet in his defense of the novel’s “organic” evocation of lived experience and the complex process of “consciousness” through which we apprehend social relations and the world in general, James ends up defending the aesthetic form of the novel as itself a moral education in what it means to be human. The modern psychological novel we today trace back to Henry James as its first and arguably most sophisticated author is distinguished by its capacity to produce an “air of reality” generally unavailable in everyday experience, marked by “the dazzle and confusion of reality” (James, 1956: 14). The novel should not, then, refer directly or “realistically” to some outside world, as James contends Besant argues, but the literary narrative initiates a process that gives us the “feeling” and “impression” of life: “Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative – much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius – it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of life into revelations” (James, 1956: 12).

James’s description of the successful novel draws obviously on key romantic assumptions and hinges on literature’s ability to represent formally the “immense sensibility” of experience, which ordinarily is unlimited and thus difficult to grasp in its significance. James’s claims for “consciousness” appear subordinate to “feeling” or “sensibility,” and the

novel he proposes seems thus to be the structural equivalent of sentimental conventions: characters as types, plots as emblematic, fictional action as symbolic, and moral persuasion based on the complete process of aesthetic immersion and identification. Henry James's fiction is thoroughly sentimental when viewed in these terms, but by formalizing "sentiment" as the entire aesthetic process he managed to displace it from mere sentimental characters and conventional plots into the "organicism" of the reader's response.

In the formalization of sentiment, modern male writers often drew upon sentimental traditions and the political efficacy of literary identification while avoiding what they feared was the conventionality of the sentimental romance. James's early novels, properly defined as romances, are difficult to distinguish from the sentimental romances. *The American* (1877) and *Daisy Miller* (1878), James's first successful novels, are thoroughly sentimental, as suggested by the dark murder plot Christopher Newman imagines he has uncovered in the history of the Bellegarde family and Daisy's conveniently tragic death of "Roman Fever" as the symbolic expression of her exclusion from high society for her improprieties and indiscretions. James's later, modernist novels from the so-called "Major Phase" are sentimental in their own rights: dying of an unspecified heart problem, Milly Theale is betrayed by her two best friends, Kate Croy and Merton Densher, fortune hunters enjoying a secret love affair in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902); Lambert Strether reveals the secret love affair between the young Chad Newsome and an older French woman, Madame de Vionnet in *The Ambassadors* (1903); Maggie Verver and her father, Adam, are similarly duped by their respective spouses, Prince Amerigo and Charlotte Stant, who make passionately adulterous (and symbolically incestuous) love in a Gloucester hotel in *The Golden Bowl* (1904).

Henry James is, of course, an important commentator on the social and political changes in America and Europe during the period of modernization, but his formalization of sentiment helped bury his social criticism behind an elaborate aesthetic facade. Some professional critics might protest that James's aesthetics, politics, and moral instruction are seamlessly integrated, but the ordinary reader is generally lost in James's complex plots, intricate prose, and subtle interpersonal relations. James's literary formalism encouraged the disarticulation of "high art" from the popular art of the nineteenth-century sentimental romance, and it did so in part by stripping the novel of overt political messages and moral imperatives. In these respects, Henry James continued the work of many of his Transcendentalist predecessors, who struggled to distinguish their romantic ideas and values from those of their feminine and minority contemporaries.

Literary and cultural history is a complex process, not an exact science, so my generalizations about the departure of "serious literature" (and perhaps philosophy, too) from the mainstream of nineteenth-century popular literature, decisively sentimental across gender and class boundaries, are subject to numerous qualifications, even objections. I should also stress that the sentimental romance hardly fits any single political and moral category in the long and changing nineteenth century. Susan Warner's evangelical Presbyterianism is as at home with the conventions of sentimentalism as Harriet Beecher Stowe's vigorous abolitionism. But it is fair to conclude that literary

sentimentalism primarily understands its cultural work as part of a larger social process, whether that be Warner's "New School" church or Stowe's Anti-Slavery Society. The self-contained modern novel disavows larger social affiliations and identifications, often disingenuously "hiding" its author (with all of his or her prejudices and virtues) behind its characters, plot, and style. The aesthetic monument of the modern American novel, preserved and polished in our curricula for teaching American literature, has followed too closely the defensive self-interest of some nineteenth-century male writers and prevented us from recognizing the broad influence of sentimental literature in the cultural, political, and social work of nineteenth-century America.

NOTES

- 1 On James's criticism of Fuller, see John Carlos Rowe, *The Other Henry James* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 38–55; on his trivialization of the American sculptor, Harriet Hosmer and other women artists, see John Carlos Rowe, *The New American Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 83–112; on James's adaptation of sentimental conventions, see William Veeder, *Henry James – The Lessons of the Master: Popular Fiction and Personal Style in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) and Virginia C. Fowler, *Henry James's American Girl: The Embroidery on the Canvas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).
- 2 Prominent in Hegel's writings, this "brother-sister" relationship also reinforced conventions of familial hierarchies, in which the male child usually assumed a leadership role in the public sphere. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (1899; New York: Dover, 1956), p. 161.
- 3 Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," was first published in Longman's Magazine (September 1884), collected in *Partial Portraits* (London: Macmillan, 1888).

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Making It New: Constructions of Modernism

Carla Kaplan

“Modernism . . . is subject to semantic confusion”

(Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane)

“Of all the empty and meaningless categories, hardly any is inherently as empty and meaningless as ‘the modern.’”

(Robert Martin Adams)

a “highly troublesome signifier”

(Astradur Eysteinnsson)

I. Modernist Expansion/Modernism Under Erasure: Definitional Problematics and “The New Modernist Studies”

“A coarsely understood Modernism is at once an historical scandal and a contemporary disability.”

Michael Levenson

Modernism is both like and unlike other periodizing terms – romanticism, regionalism, or realism, for examples – which literary historians use to generalize about the cultural and aesthetic work done by those expressive forms we associate with various historical moments. Where other terms seem chiefly descriptive, occasioning arguments about which works do and do not fit, the highly approbative nature of “Modernism” has led to pitched battles for cultural cache.

To make matters more difficult, "Modernism" has been a highly celebrated term. Indeed, "no classifying concept has played a greater part in academic research or English poetry and fiction in the twentieth century . . . Many people have a stake in the term," as Marianne Thormahlen puts it. And yet it has also been a term with hopelessly protean meanings. "Since its inception as a category of literary study during the 1930s . . . Modernism has been notoriously inhospitable to definition" (Blair, 1999).

"Modernism" is often used to mean two very different things, one general, one specific. On the one hand, Modernism often broadly describes an entire historical period, designating whatever is written between, say, 1910 and 1945 (although the start and end dates of Modernism are, themselves, subjects of fierce debate). Sometimes "less a [specific] style than a search for a style" in a world of uncertainties, the modern period is often figured, generally, as "a profound shift in what could be taken as unquestionable assumptions" (Bradbury and McFarlane, 1976: 29; Howe, 1971). On the other hand, Modernism has just as often been used to designate a highly particular set of aesthetic practices characteristic of only a very small number of literary works: those works which emphasize "abstraction, discontinuity . . . shock . . . irony [and] experimentation" (Bradbury and McFarlane, 1976: 24). Among those features listed as Modernist are "radical aesthetics, technical experimentation, spatial or rhythmic rather than chronological form, self-conscious reflexivity, skepticism towards the idea of a centred human subject, and a sustained inquiry into the uncertainty of reality" (Childs, 2000: 18). All of these stylistic innovations were attempts, as Pound famously put it, "to make it new," to see the world afresh and open up possibilities for a language seen, at best, as stale.

But, of course, the modern period witnessed myriad stylistics, all of them seen in their day as significant, innovative, "new." One solution to the definitional woes of Modernism, then, has been to refer broadly to "the modern period" (whatever was produced between certain years) but more narrowly to "the Modernists" (Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Lewis, Conrad, Yeats, Beckett, Williams, Joyce, Lawrence, Stein, and so on).¹ There are advantages to this solution. It preserves an important distinction between a multifaceted, complex period and the artistic innovations of a select group of artists, allowing us to retain the historical specificity necessary for asking why certain writers did certain things and not others. But there are disadvantages as well. This solution works, as I hope to suggest, only insofar as we pretend that when we designate someone as "Modernist" or "not-Modernist" we are being merely descriptive, not evaluative.

While Modernism seems so notoriously hard to define, *labeling* individual artists as "Modernist" or "not-Modernist" has proved more facile. "With regard to literature," Peter Childs writes, "Modernism is best understood through the work of the Modernist authors who wrote in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century." In a similar vein, Robert Martin Adams maintains that we can answer "What was Modernism?" by "naming the great works that inaugurated this period and thinking, however seriously, about their quality." Catalogues of Modernist stylistics are usually generated by taking the names of writers handed down to us – by themselves and

one another – and then designating as Modernist whatever these writers were doing. Such extraction tends to appear merely descriptive, nothing more (or less) than a common-sense, inductive process. This was the Modernism that most of us learned, and that some of us still teach: hand-me-down Modernism we might call it.

Hand-me-down Modernism, however, has come in for three interlocking challenges in recent years. The first, which will not be my concern here, has to do with what it means to call something “modern”: “the inappropriateness of applying so semantically mobile and indeed febrile a term to a historical phenomenon we now wish to root in time” (Bradbury and McFarlane). If modern signals “newness” or “nowness,” what does it mean to be calling that which is now a hundred years old “modern” or “new” (Levenson, 1999)? The second challenge to Modernism, also not the concern of this chapter, has to do with trying to affix nationality to an international movement. In Bradbury and McFarlane’s words, “modernism can look surprisingly different depending on where one finds the centre, in which capital (or province) one happens to stand.” The third challenge to received notions of Modernism questions not so much its claim to newness or its national boundedness, but, rather, its dominance over the twentieth century more broadly. This challenge to modernism, called “The New Modernist Studies,”² aims to “recover a less well-known tradition . . . and hence to reshape and redefine the contours of literary history” (Felski, 1995: 24).

Thanks to The New Modernist Studies, modernism is now up for grabs. In place of “a highly selected version of the modern, which then offers to appropriate the whole of modernity,” scholars of Modernism now attend to what Raymond Williams has called “the machinery of selective tradition” which has privileged some traditions and styles over others. “We must,” Williams argues, “search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century.” Accounting for the cultural production of artists and intellectuals who may not be high modernists but whose work nevertheless offered important critiques of modernity; establishing modernism’s relationship to political currents such as feminism, socialism, and the struggle for African-American rights; reevaluating the aesthetic, political, and cultural claims of practitioners of Modernism whose own self-descriptions have too long determined the shape of literary scholarship on Modernism, often limiting the very terms of the debate – such concerns have led to a reconsideration of Modernism from numerous perspectives, both ideological and disciplinary.

Ann Ardis and Leslie Lewis have recently described the “‘new modernist studies’ [as] the revisionary scholarship on literary modernism that is currently reenergizing turn-of-the twentieth-century studies” (Ardis and Lewis, 2003). Building on efforts to add an “s” to modernism which date at least as far back as the late 1960s (Childs, 2000; Kermode, 1968), The New Modernist Studies seeks to investigate the many competing aesthetic agendas characteristic of the modern period. Modernism became “ripe for repudiation” and canonical “repair work” (North, 1999) not so much by neglecting these other agendas, as by successfully claiming success for its own aesthetics against all others. “The ‘New Modernisms,’ Felski writes, are “speaking to a sense of weariness with reverential rereadings of modernist masters and an eagerness for broader and

more expansive maps of the modern that can locate texts squarely in the political fault lines and fissures of culture" (Felski, 2003). Only by creating such maps, The New Modernist Studies argues, can we answer this question: "How did modernism come to be perceived as *the* aesthetic of modernity?" (Ardis, 2002). Recent works of feminist and African-American criticism, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of lesbian, gay, and cultural studies, have been particularly engaged in redrawing those maps of Modernism. The New Modernist Studies offers "a conceptual map of the different modernist tendencies" and reveals that hand-me-down Modernism "could be seen to constitute only one strand of a highly complex set of cultural developments at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Nicholls, 1995: viii, vii). Or as Sarah Blair puts it, "high Anglo-American Modernism, with its embrace of ideals of cultural unity and organicism, hierarchy, and social order, is only one of many modernisms."

In place of yet another overview of Modernism, old or new, with or without its "s," my goal here is to suggest a point of tension in this remapping work that has been creating a new Modernism for us and to take up one of its central thematics – the links between Modernism and race – as a way of suggesting the "divergent systems of value" (Smith, 1984) which "the machinery of selective tradition" obscures.

In *The Pink Guitar*, a gender-bending allusion to high Modernism in the persons of both Pablo Picasso and Wallace Stevens, Rachel Blau Du Plessis offers what we might read as a coda for The New Modernist Studies:

Modernist agendas concealed highly conventional metaphors and narratives of gender, views of women as static, immobile, eternal, goddess-like. Until the problematic of women is solved, no writer is truly modern. Modernist agendas conceal highly conventional views of race – African-Americans as primitive, "colorful," picturesque people. Until the problematic of race is solved, no writer is truly modern.

The proposition may be a tad stiff, as Du Plessis's somewhat parodic language suggests, but the proof has definitely been in the pudding. Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Gertrude Stein, Elizabeth Bishop, Mina Loy, Charlotte Mew, Djuna Barnes, Willa Cather, Claude McKay, and Susan Glaspell, among others, are becoming ever more frequent features of Modernist survey courses and of the newly emerging studies of Modernism which seek to disrupt "the machinery of selective tradition." We not only have many more authors we can now discuss as Modernists, we also have many more ways in which their Modernism can be understood: in relation to a more widely conceived terrain of modern philosophy, in relation to the social construction of the gendered and racialized modern "self," in relation to histories of colonialism and imperialism, in relation to the discourses and strategies of modern politics, in relation to a range of other disciplines, from anthropology to theology and the modern sciences, in relation to realism and sentimentalism, newly conceived not as Modernism's other but as its companion and collaborator, and so on.

Much of the work of The New Modernist Studies, not surprisingly, has been devoted to canon expansion and the recuperation of Modernist texts – or texts written during the modern period – which were either neglected or denigrated. As Scott (1990) put

it in her introduction to *The Gender of Modernism*, “Modernism, as we were taught it at midcentury was perhaps halfway to truth.” One influential text of canon expansion has been Houston Baker’s widely cited *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), a study which counters long-standing claims that African-American writing of the early twentieth century was “provincial” and “old fashioned,” that it was characterized by failure: of boldness, of imagination, of subversion, of originality. Failure, Baker demonstrates, is hardly the issue. W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson, even Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Booker T. Washington, Baker shows, were wonderfully original in their use of available forms. Their innovations become more visible when we learn to adjust our critical lens. Baker suggests as much when he argues that African-American modernism needs to be measured not by a white, Western “yardstick” or subjected to the same “delusory set of evaluative criteria” that have served as the foundation for the modernist canon.

But canon expansion does not necessarily lead to a revision of the standards of periodization that could have so misread black writers for so long. In fact, canon expansion may work to actually fortify traditional criteria rather than challenge them or, more importantly, reveal their historicity. This is true whenever the argument is made that previously marginalized writers “deserve” to be considered as modernists too: “giving [Rebecca] West her due,” for example, as one who could make use of “nonlinear sequences of images and impression,” “techniques of juxtaposition and discordance,” “a voice at once personal and playful, capable of assuming a variety of personae” (Stetz, 1994), or showing that the “narrative features” of Dorothy Richardson’s writing – encyclopedic form, “nonlinear and spatial narrative, stream of consciousness, and exploration of inner reality,” for example – “strikingly resemble those we call modernist today” (Felber, 1994). David Kadlec’s recent study groups together Pound, Joyce, Williams, Moore, and Hurston “as writers who struggled against reference in language” (2000). Celeste Schenck suggests that just as “the radical poetics of canonized ‘Modernism’ often masks a deeply conservative politics, might it also be true that the seemingly genteel, conservative poetics of women . . . would pitch a more radical politics than we considered possible” (1990)? Marianne DeKoven argues that “if we take a moment to define, briefly, the salient formal features of Modernism – the cluster of stylistic practices that, more than any of Modernism’s other describable features, we use intuitively to identify literary works as Modernist – it becomes clear that women writers were just as instrumental in developing these forms as the great male writers usually credited with inventing Modernism . . . [women writers have] just as valid a claim to modernist ‘origination’” (1991).

This argument for validity and worthiness is characteristic of canon expansion work in The New Modernist Studies. Baker, for example, having cautioned against measuring African-American literary production by white standards, goes on to make a compelling case that African-American writers “deserve” to be modernists too. *If* we assume aesthetic sensitivity to “a profound shift in what could be taken as unquestionable assumptions” (Howe, 1971: 5) as the signal characteristic of Modernism, we can, Baker argues, hardly avoid the recognition that what appear to

be standard, conventional, realist writings are really “masks,” “performances,” and “postures” of conventionality rather than conventionality itself (1987: 85) and that African-American writers were deeply committed to the Modernist project of questioning conventions. African-American writers, in other words, “deserve” to be considered Modernist too.

This slippage in Baker’s argument from an anti-expansionist exercise in recuperation to an exercise in expansion itself, is virtually ubiquitous in *The New Modernist Studies*. Let us turn to one more example of this slippage, from Gilbert and Gubar’s important and influential essay “The Female Imagination and the Modernist Aesthetic” (1986):

Alienated, dispossessed or excluded from culture, women might seem to be the prototypical *poetes maudit* and thus the first modernists . . . the strategies women writers devised for themselves as they confronted a patriarchal literary tradition might seem to furnish models for modernism. Certainly techniques such as subversive parody, disruption of linear plot, opening up of form, or fragmentation of point of view. . . . Certainly, too, the paradigmatic modernist seems himself as ensnared in the same web of ‘silence, exile, and cunning’ that has both confined and delivered women writers since the nineteenth century. It could even be argued, then, that in their problematic relationship to the tradition of authority, as well as to the authority of tradition, women writers are the major precursors of all twentieth-century modernists, the *avant garde* of the *avant garde*, so to speak.

Is this our only alternative? If *The New Modernist Studies* is to go beyond arguing that “neglected figures [deserve entry] into what is now seen as a limited definition,” as Scott (1990) puts it, if it is to truly take a more inclusive look at the array of simultaneously occurring literary aesthetics in this period and to ask anew what the significance is of the differences between them, how is it to do so?

In place of cataloguing characteristics – fragmentation, concern with subjectivity, break-up of linearity, anti-romanticism, alienation, and so on – or augmenting the list of modernist practitioners by adding a few non-traditional writers, many of the new modernist critics concentrate on reconstructing modernism as a field of contestation, as the site in which different – and ultimately irreconcilable – cultural and literary values came into conflict: the archeological record, in a sense, not of a coherent set of practices and ideas, but instead of the complicated victory of one set of (internally variegated and inconsistent) values in its struggle with many competing alternatives; a “disputed terrain” (Benstock, 1994) within which we can “recover fierce contests over the social meaning of the literary” (Blair, 1999). This is a useful point of departure. But it also has limits.

The agenda of *The New Modernist Studies* confounds itself by forcing us to ask what *is* this “Modernism” to which we would add neglected and misread texts? What will be the new determinants for what does and does not count as “Modernist”? How can we reconstruct Modernism, in short, while simultaneously calling into question its categorical status? What does it mean to be remapping “Modernism” once we have established that “Modernism” may be, finally, little more than the label we have learned to give to those characteristics, attitudes, and practitioners we have caused,

for whole complexes of reasons, to triumph over their rivals, the result, as DeKoven (1991) puts it, “of unpredestined outcomes of cultural-political struggles”?

In light of this dilemma, many of the New Modernist critics suggest that the problem is hopelessly circular, that “Modernism” is a meaningless category which needs to be replaced with a seemingly more capacious term like “early-twentieth-century studies” (Jacobs, 1994). In addition to Modernism with an “s” (see for example Brooker, 1992; Nicholls, 1995; and Witemeyer, 1997), some propose a variety of new terms, including: historical Modernism, early Modernism, high Modernism, canonical Modernism (Nicholls, 1995), “modernism in the more restricted sense” (Blair, 1999), and what I have been calling “hand-me-down Modernism.” “Perhaps modernism as we think of it never existed,” Suzette Henke writes (1992). Ann Ardis questions whether “the best way to map . . . a richer, thicker history of the period is by expanding the category ‘modernism’ to include reference to women and other minorities excluded from that original coterie” (Ardis and Lewis, 2003). But she concludes that what we need is “turn-of-the-century studies, not modernist studies *per se*” (2002). Houston Baker ultimately replaces the term Modernism with “renaissancism,” writing a brilliant history of the cultural aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance – “if the spokespersons and other productive black men and women of the 1920s Harlem are auditioned in relation to a sounding field called *renaissancism*, their contributions and value as national resources and as audible signs of the human will’s resistance to tyranny and the human mind’s masterful and insistent engagement with forms and deformation can only be judged a resounding success” – but a history, nonetheless, that ultimately elides any attempt to come to grips with the problematic implied by his own title. The history of “renaissancism” need not tell us, for example, why Claude McKay’s diasporic stories of black sailors succeed in constructing the very economy of exchange which Ernest Hemingway insists modern culture has made impossible, because it can drop the comparison between these two writers. Nor need “renaissancism” tell us why so many black American writers from the turn of the century through World War II called for a renewal of realist form nor why for these writers romance remained viable long after writers such as William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway had confidently proclaimed its death. A history of “renaissancism” or “turn-of-the-century studies” does not need to explain why it has been so difficult to assimilate African-American writers to the “Modernist” canon.³

Objecting to these various moves to replace “Modernism” with a broader, more inclusive term, Rita Felski has argued that “to dissolve the specificity of ‘modernism’ in this way is to render an already vague term effectively useless by robbing it of any meaningful referent” (1995). Her point is well taken. But Felski suggests that we retain the term as a descriptor only, an acknowledgment of “formal and aesthetic distinctions between texts” whose relative values we can, then, interrogate and argue “by questioning and rethinking the meanings that are frequently assigned to these distinctions” (1995). Appealing as this solution may seem – allowing us to hold on to historical specificity but not the cultural value attached *to* that history – Felski’s solution assumes that we can, in fact, separate the descriptive from the evaluative.

It assumes that to describe is not, in itself, an act of assigning value, making a claim for value and/or significance. Unfortunately, though, the two are inseparable. Assignations of value tend to work best not by seeming to be what they *are* but, in fact, by seeming merely or primarily descriptive: “the labels or category names under which we encounter objects (think ‘innovative’ or ‘experimental’ or ‘formalistic’ or ‘new’ literary styles and strategies) not only . . . foreground certain of their possible functions but also operate as signs – in effect as culturally certified endorsements – of their more or less effective performance of those functions” (Smith, 1984). It is no more possible to separate the descriptive from the evaluative, it seems, than it is to both expand and erase Modernism all at once.

Indeed, it often seems as if we must choose between two, conflicting approaches – one that would expand “Modernism” and one that would put it under erasure, one that would accept handed-down evaluations and one that would eschew evaluation altogether. In the two sections which follow, I want to investigate the blocks The New Modernist Studies has encountered in winning acceptance for new paradigms of Modernism. I would suggest that these stumbling blocks have, ironically, much to do with both an excess of conservatism and also a certain failure to conserve. They suggest both the difficulty and the need to keep contradictory imperatives in play simultaneously. Ceding “Modernism” altogether, I will argue, fails to give us the plural history which we seek. The best work of The New Modernist Studies, as I hope to show with specific reference to work on Modernism and race, succeeds best when it attempts to both simultaneously erase *and* stabilize Modernism.

II. Rethinking Modernism: “Are We There Yet?”

If I have suggested that The New Modernist Studies has completely supplanted old models of Modernism, I want to clarify that it has done so only at the level of graduate studies and up. Mainstream histories of Modernism and undergraduate textbooks designed to introduce students to the field remain wedded to the older paradigms. For example, we might begin with two very recent, very large books confidently laying claim to definitive histories of modernism in new and final versions fashioned especially for the millennium. Both books were published a little over a decade ago and aimed at the widest possible audience. Both are well over 500 pages long. Both contain extensive bibliographies, notes, and indexes. Both are published by major trade publishers with extensive distribution. Both promise to bestow modernism’s *true* story, at last. And both received extensive financial backing to do so.

William Everdell’s *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought*, begins, as does Norman Cantor’s *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times*, by insisting that “we really can define modernism,” that to do so we have only to “cut modernism loose from a populous entourage” and refocus on modernism’s aesthetic and formal innovations as practiced by a select group of practitioners within whose cultural practice can be discerned “a set of centrally located ideas” (Everdell,

1997: 8). For both Everdell and Cantor, the practitioners in question are all white and all male, although Everdell does concede that “some [modernists], indeed are women,” (1997: 2); unfortunately, they lacked what he calls “genius” (2). Cantor tells us that modernism is “reflexive anti-Victorianism” and both repeat just the highly selective personal and aesthetic paradigm – Eliot, Stevens, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Dos Passos, anti-narrativity, anti-linearity, internalization, fragmentation, atomization, self-referentiality – which *The New Modernist Studies* has done so much to remap. Cantor’s “exhaustive” index contains no listings for: the Harlem Renaissance, feminism, homosexuality, lesbianism, race, gender, African-Americans, or blacks. There is no entry for Jean Toomer, for example, the black writer who did as much to explode the novel as Joyce, Faulker, Dos Passos, or Hemingway. Even Gertrude Stein, finally acknowledged by most as a centrally important modernist figure, is mentioned only twice and at that only in two throwaways in which Cantor groups her, along with Sylvia Beach and Peggy Guggenheim, as playing, “important roles in fostering literature and the arts.” Clearly enamored of this formulation of Stein as hostess, Cantor repeats it over a hundred pages later by stating that “the famous Parisian scene in the 1920s was led by three remarkable American women who acted as patrons of literature and art.”

Everdell’s index, also extensive, has no listings for the Harlem Renaissance, feminism, homosexuality, lesbianism, race, gender, blacks, or Jean Toomer. Stein is listed a number of times but discussed only in terms of what other (male) artists and writers were doing – stopping by her salon, painting her, dropping her a line – virtually every mention of which is literally parenthesized. Unlike Cantor’s, Everdell’s book does include a listing for African-Americans. But their only contributions to Modernism, if we are to believe Everdell’s index, are jazz, blues, and as ethnic curios for the St. Louis World’s Fair, a highly troubling example of primitivism which Everdell seems to take for granted.

Both these texts, in spite of being “new,” are obviously also very conservative. They want, above all, to conserve traditional notions of Modernism: a select group of practitioners responsible for a difficult, innovative style. But are Everdell and Cantor alone in this?

The Sixth Edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Nina Baym (2003), aimed for a “new” literary history of Modernism as well. But it also practices certain conservatisms. Importantly, those conservatisms resonate with the definitional stumbling blocks I’ve identified with *The New Modernist Studies*. On the one hand, Norton’s “Introduction to Modernism” is divided into a number of rubrics which have the advantage of contextualizing Modernism in terms of “Changing Times,” “African-Americans,” and women. But since each of these rubrics is separate, there is no mechanism by which African-Americans or women can actually rewrite the Modernism they contextualize. Such rubrics, then, work to stabilize Modernism as white and male. The use of such rubrics contributed, no doubt, to the volume’s omission of such important black Modernist texts as Wallace Thurman’s “Cordelia the Crude,”

Richard Bruce Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," or Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. The stabilization of traditional Modernism via contextualizing rubrics, while preserving historical specificity, not only leaves gaps in the synchronous record of diverse cultural production – leaving even such an influential text as Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* out of the record altogether, presumably because of its use of realist conventions – it contributes to the normalizing invisibility by which Modernism's putative whiteness can be taken for granted and unquestioned.

The conservation of traditional Modernism evident in all three texts is not disconnected from the canon expansion which contests it. The argument for conservation goes basically like this: writers who may have been every bit as – thematically – disgruntled with society (women writers, black writers, realist writers) but who failed to articulate their discontent in ways that were truly "new," or "innovative," or "shocking" cannot be said to be advancing a cultural revolution if they register alienation, internalization, fragmentation, and despair, for example, *only* thematically. Failing to do so aesthetically they then failed to alienate their writing itself sufficiently from their predecessors and, so, however prescient their ideological critiques may have been, they don't "deserve" to be called cultural or aesthetic revolutionaries. Faced with such claims, to argue that a previously excluded writer like Richardson or Wharton engages in surreptitious aesthetics that make her a Modernist too or that the thematic questioning of the modern self and its boundaries of a writer like James Weldon Johnson or Jessie Fauset is so radical as to earn them a kind of honorary membership in Modernism, in spite of their retrograde adherence to narrative, linearity, and realism, actually reinforces the old hierarchy of values. Perhaps more importantly, it does so not by endorsing those values – quite the contrary – but by reinforcing traditional distinctions between form and content which go unaddressed.

Nancy Armstrong has argued that this is precisely the distinction which we need to eschew. In her account, the purported distinction between form and content or theme is an entirely specious reflection of cultural hegemony. "What we call 'form,'" she writes, "is simply the dominant theme of a given moment. In turn, what we call 'theme' identifies certain residual and undervalued terms, potentially capable of becoming new cultural forms" (Armstrong, 1993). At stake in Armstrong's challenge is one of the largest questions of literary study in general and modernist studies in particular: what exactly do we mean by "form" and to what exactly is it "opposed"?

Armstrong's argument has important implications for rethinking Modernism. The most pluralistic models of period study – and period study, as Carole Snee reminds us, was originally a model of radical pluralism – tend to elide aesthetics *altogether* by focusing on the broadest possible cultural problematics precisely to bracket, as Snee puts it, "whether the texts be 'literary' or 'non-literary' in nature" and to ensure that "any 'texts' studied have an initial common status" (Snee, 1982). While this draws variant practices into a much larger historical dialogue, it *also* ensures the increasing irrelevance of the very aesthetics we seek to compare.

The complications of the aesthetics/theme divide, from the perspective of expanding the Modernist canon, are manifest in Michael North's book, *Reading 1922* (1999). Here, North wants to widen what we consider the Modernist aesthetic so that it would be "possible to contain within the purview of modernist studies a good deal of material conventionally separated from the extreme literary experimentation of Eliot, Joyce, or Stein . . . At the very least, it should be possible to expand the canon to include writers like McKay, Cather, and Yeziarska, who have never been considered modernists though they exhibit an acute awareness of modern conditions." And yet, North acknowledges, "the problem here is that modernism has always been defined by reference to its formal properties, and there is little formal similarity between Cather and Joyce or McKay and Eliot." Interestingly, North resolves the problem by moving to thematics and using shared themes to broaden the canon, although he does not quite acknowledge having done so *via* thematics *as opposed* to aesthetics. "This objection," he writes, "is neutralized to some extent by the fact that the usual lists of formal characteristics do not describe even the most commonly canonized modernists very well . . . It is not necessary for any particular formal characteristic to be present as long as the writer experiments with form." To give us an expanded Modernism, on these terms, is to eschew investigation into the meaning and importance of aesthetic differences since few thematic explorations of the conditions of modernity could not be said to experiment with form – even if it is traditional form – in some way.

Rather than take Armstrong's position, that we abandon the form/content, aesthetics/theme distinction altogether, North's dilemma suggests the need for heightening the distinction. Rather than move *away* from the aesthetics of "any particular formal characteristic" to combine Eliot and McKay or Cather and Joyce or Stein and Yeziarska, we might examine – precisely – the very "particular" aesthetic/formal choices made by each. In a context of shared thematic and cultural concerns over the state of "the modern," comparisons which reveal the cultural contingency of form might prove more useful than claims for aesthetic similarity.

Attempts to expand Modernism through claims to aesthetic, formal, or stylistic sameness have failed, for the most part, to assimilate the writing of the Harlem Renaissance. "The literature, arts, and music of African Americans centered in Harlem are simply missing from conventional maps of Modernism. Not even represented with an occasional token figure, as female modernists like Woolf and Stein sometimes are. Simply not there" (Friedman, 2001). Friedman, among others, would like to see this work assimilated, along with all of the writing of the period that histories of Modernism ignore.

Linguistic and rhythmic experimentation, intertextual 'signifyin',' Africanist myth-making, parodic mimicry, revolutionary fervor, and self-identification with the New do not seem to qualify them [black writers] for literary modernism in most histories of the movement even though these same histories frequently list formalist experimentation, citation, mythic analogues, irony, and self-reflexivity as definitional markers. Since the Harlem Renaissance is largely absent from the pool of texts out of which literary

historians generate definitional characterizations of modernism, the particular formulations of modernity produced by African Americans are also missing.

Perhaps we should not be surprised that this has been, and continues to be, true. In the view of the Harlem Renaissance's chief aesthetic architect, Alain Locke, the cultural contingency of form and aesthetics may make it very difficult ever to include new groups just by adding an "s" to existing literary histories. According to Locke, cultural conditions facing African-Americans obviated not only recourse to high modernist aesthetics of "self-consciousness, simultaneity, juxtaposition and montage, paradox, ambiguity, and uncertainty" (Felski, 1995), but nearly obviated entire genres as well. Black poetry, Locke argued, was vanishing "for obvious reasons" at the end of the Harlem Renaissance. What was "obvious" to Locke was that poetry required a certain "maturity" and the presence of "group contacts" which were not available to "the Negro poet whose cultural isolation is marked." If much Negro poetry was not being written, Locke implied, then it was experiencing a "natural death," not to be measured by the cultural work which others – such as the Modernists – believed poetry could perform but, rather, to be understood from within the cultural/aesthetic conditions of the community turning away from poetry. Should such poetry be left, then, out of accounts of Modernism? Locke might suggest that it should be left out, but only so that we might better understand its absence and the significance of that absence.

Locke's implicit position is that we can neither erase nor expand the Modernism we've inherited nor can we simply add an "s" to it but that we must, at all times, do all of these three things *and* none of them so that we can compare the modern arts in ways that preserve the historicity of their differences. Locke was often conservative about the arts, certainly more so than many of the young black writers whose careers he helped to advance. But Locke was also a fierce defender of the arts. And his conservative instinct – as opposed to the conservatism we find in an Everdell or a Cantor – might help conserve the specificity of Harlem Renaissance aesthetics as modern black writing is brought into Modernism.

III. Modernism and Race: Who is Adding the "S"?

One difficulty with efforts to assimilate modern black writing to Modernism has been that it is standard, white Modernism to which black writing is added, without necessarily producing a detailed analysis of the whiteness of Modernism itself. Rarely is it the case that white Modernism is assimilated to black. In conclusion, let us consider the case of racial ventriloquism – fascination with the culture of the "other" and a stylistic effort to inhabit and articulate his or her voice, consciousness, rhythms, and sensibility – which has been receiving increasing attention in Modernist studies. "Given many modernists' alienation," Susan Gubar writes in *Racechanges* (1997), "from conventional, linear, logical, causal structures of aesthetic forms and modes of intellection, it is hardly surprising that a number of Eliot's contemporaries were drawn to

what has been called the ‘altiloquent speech’ of stage blacks, a language full of sound and fury but signifying next to nothing.”

The most widely-cited example of racial ventriloquism is Gertrude Stein’s “Melanctha,” the most sinuous, rhythmic, self-reflexive, and emotive of the three sections of her *Three Lives*. As Gubar points out, “Melanctha” goes beyond thematics, in fact comments rather derisively *on* thematics – because Stein attempts “writing not *only* about but also *as*” Melanctha:

“Yes, I certainly do see that very clear Dr. Campbell,” said Melanctha, “I see that’s certainly what it is always made me not know right about you and that’s certainly what it is that makes you really mean what you was always saying. You certainly are just too scared Dr. Campbell to really feel things way down in you. All you are always wanting Dr. Campbell, is just to talk about being good, and to play with people just to have a good time, and yet always to certainly keep yourself out of trouble. It don’t seem to me Dr. Campbell that I admire that way to do things very much. It certainly ain’t really to me being very good. It certainly ain’t any more to me Dr. Campbell, but that you certainly are awful scared about really feeling things way down in you, and that’s certainly the only way Dr. Campbell I can see that you can mean, by what it is that you are always saying to me.”

To inhabit something as “thematically” alien, to her, as blackness, Stein is induced to rupture standard plot, characterization, description, diction, and syntax, to deploy repetition, circularity, and free association, to restrict vocabulary, to move inside Melanctha or Jeff’s consciousness, to exaggerate the use of present participles, to obscure the referent of pronouns, and to articulate sensibility rather than ideas. “Melanctha” strikes the reader because it seems so alien. The reader, however, implicitly, must be white.

What of racial ventriloquism in the other direction that moves from putatively alien blackness to speak in a – seemingly – normative, white voice? Contemporaneous with *Three Lives* (1909) but never – to my knowledge – considered in terms of *aesthetic* masquerade or ventriloquism in the way *Three Lives* is, James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* was published three years after *Three Lives* in 1912. Here, Johnson’s narrator passes between separate, self-standing, racial worlds and as he becomes white, must learn to ventriloquize the speech, sensibility, rhythms, and consciousness of a – to him – alien white man. Consider his opening lines: “I know that in writing the following pages I am divulging the great secret of my life, the secret which for some years I have guarded far more carefully than any of my earthly possessions; and it is a curious study to me to analyze the motives which prompt me to do it.” As we read these lines, we have no idea that the speaker is a black man. That is the “great secret” which the narrative will reveal. In other words, the novel does not just thematize passing and the adoption of an alien voice, it inhabits the formal differentiations which that change in race identity would entail. It offers us a “white” voice, effectively racializing whiteness. The formal effects of this type of ventriloquizing are both enormously complex and inseparable from the “thematics” of changing racial identity. Nor should we minimize ventriloquism that goes

from black to white on the grounds that whites are less alien to blacks, in say 1910, than the other way around. Most turn of the century and modernist stories of passing suggest exactly the opposite, painting the experience of blacks voicing whiteness as so profoundly alien and hellish that it is a devastating “life-in-death,” as Gubar puts it, a life of fragmentation, alienation, surfaces, lack of coherent narratives, impossibility of narration, non-linearity, internalization, atomization, and painful self-referentiality.

Werner Sollors, in *Neither Black Nor White, Yet Both*, notes that in light of the hoax perpetrated by Johnson’s anonymity on publication, a condition that made the novel an “act of passing” for a true story, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* “represents . . . a formal answer to the theme of passing” (Sollors, 1997). We may (if we are white readers) identify with the cross-over that is Stein’s and recognize it *as* cross-over and innovation. I’m not sure that we (if we are white readers) identify with Johnson’s difficult cross-over in the same way. This is not to say that Johnson’s formal ventriloquism in creating the voice of a white or pseudo-white narrator is necessarily more or less innovative than Stein’s formal ventriloquism in creating Melanctha’s voice of blackness. Rather, this is the evaluative question that has been begged. Evaluations of Stein’s experimentalism depend, in other words, on the cultural – and racial – vantage point of the evaluator. Her innovativeness is formally tied to a perceptive whiteness of view to which it is not merely incidental. What looks to “us” like an innovation or cultural leap, finally, has everything to do with who “we” are. The received set of modernist aesthetics innovations – anti-narrativity, anti-linearity, internalization, fragmentation, atomization, self-referentiality, and so on – aren’t evoked *so as* to exclude, say, a realist writer such as Johnson or Jessie Fauset, Anzia Yezierska or Willa Cather. The “new” is a question of what we – whoever “we” are – recognize not just as new but even as a departure, of what “our” point of departure is in the first place.

And, unfortunately, most of the work of The New Modernist Studies has turned to modern black writing because it seems “new” from the vantage point of traditional Modernism, which is to say, from a vantage point of whiteness. As Susan Gubar puts it in her book, *Racechanges*, “black language practices . . . offered an irresistible strategy for revitalizing the stale conventionalities of traditional forms.” Similarly, when Michael North writes that “linguistic mimicry and racial masquerade were not just shallow fads but strategies without which modernism could not have arisen” (North, 1994), it seems clear, at least in this instance, that modernism is white, its aesthetics *draw* on blacks. For white writers, blackness, because it is so alien, is, in Marianne DeKoven’s words, a “force of disruptive fascination or fascinating disruption” (1991). Attempts to revitalize Modernism via black writing are not, it turns out, as different from the Modernists’ own use of Africanist art to revitalize their work. The danger here is not so much that The New Modernist Studies will repeat the primitivist gestures of traditional Modernism. Rather, it is that in trying to revise Modernism by adding modern black writing to it, what will be revitalized will be little more than the Modernism we’ve always had and so, in the process, we may fail to understand why it has, for so long, been both so white and so male.

NOTES

- 1 There are, of course, many variations of this list. Hugh Witemeyer, for example, writes that most of the contributors to his volume *The Future of Modernism* (1997) “agreed upon Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Williams, Stevens, Cummings, H.D., Moore, Stein, Woolf, Forster, Lawrence, Conrad, Ford, Lewis, Faulkner, and Hemingway as comprising the significant figures of modernism.”
- 2 Portions of this essay were first presented in 1994 at a Modern Language Association Panel entitled “The New Modernist Studies: Definitional Problematics.” I am grateful to Susan Stanford Friedman for organizing the panel, one of the first to introduce “The New Modernist Studies.”
- 3 See also Ann Douglas (1996), who offers a recent history of cultural pluralism as a substitute for a singular “Modernism,” and ultimately turns to the romance paradigm itself to read “Modernism” as a skeptical movement of hard-driven, honest, unsentimental white writers at odds with their more sentimental, celebratory, culturally complacent black contemporaries. In place of a story of ModernismS, Douglas’s narrative – once again – places black writers *outside* of Modernism.

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Academicizing “American Literature”

Elizabeth Renker

People outside academe are often perplexed when I tell them that one of my research areas is the history of American literature, not as a group of literary texts but as a field of study. Why, they wonder, is an English professor writing about the history of something other than literary texts? Why is an English professor writing about history at all? And why is this subject anything we need to know about? Undergraduates ask me similarly perplexed questions. Aren't the great American books that we read in our classes just obviously great books? Didn't students always read them? What does history have to do with it?

My title, “Academicizing ‘American Literature,’” points to the fact that “American literature” has not always existed as a category of knowledge. Both the canon – that is, the list of great books as it is imagined at any point in time – and approaches to reading are products of complex historical processes. They change, often drastically, from era to era. Case in point: although it is conventional for educated Americans today to think of American literature as a rich body of works, well worth reading and studying, American literature did not attain that widespread acceptance until after World War II. This kind of dramatic fluctuation in notions of literary value is not unusual, but typical of the ongoing negotiations between cultures of readers and concepts of “the literary,” a special category of reading material that usually connotes some kind of enduring merit or value. But how enduring is merit or value when such definitions themselves change?

A century ago few people thought American literature had sufficient merit to warrant a place in college curricula. While widely taught at the elementary and high school levels by the late nineteenth century, most colleges and universities remained inhospitable to it until the mid-twentieth century. It was considered an easy, unserious subject, one too insubstantial to warrant specialized expertise or investigation, and therefore best suited to more rudimentary levels of education. The complex historical process through which American literature's image changed and it became a field of knowledge worthy of university-level study is the process that I here call “academicizing.”

It is essential for the new student of this subject to understand the social context in which scholarly “fields” first arose in the United States. These, too, have not always existed, and the typical fare offered to the college student prior to 1875 bears little relation to what the typical undergraduate studies today. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the social organization of the nation was utterly transformed. Historian Robert H. Wiebe notes that, before the war, the US was composed of relatively isolated local communities. Afterward, it was linked for the first time by a transcontinental railroad as well as other trends in finance, industrialism, urbanization, and bureaucracy, all of which created a national fabric that replaced the localism of the antebellum period. People struggled to give up smaller-town ways and to adapt to a national culture, an historical transition that marks this period with a massive sense of dislocation.

One of the many social reorganizations of the post-bellum period was the rise of professions, as a result of which Americans began to conceive of work in a new way. Social historians point out that people on a large scale began during this time to identify themselves by their occupations. As a culture of professionalism arose, national systems for training and credentializing professionals were also born. Organizations like the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association developed their roles as national authorities and established policies for professional certification; in like spirit, the American PhD was born as a means of certifying the new profession of scholar-professor.

Prior to the founding of The Johns Hopkins University in 1876, the small number of Americans in search of doctorates had typically gone to Germany to get the degree. Johns Hopkins made the PhD its educational cause, and in doing so both invented the PhD as an American phenomenon and revolutionized American higher education. It was through the influence of the Hopkins model, which rapidly spread nationwide, that the PhD eventually became a required credential for college and university teaching.

As the Hopkins PhD model increasingly dominated American higher education after 1876, the lives of students and teachers in higher education also changed dramatically. For example, it was not until the 1890s that college study was organized into subject areas called “departments,” which is now so standard as to seem inevitable. Earlier in the nineteenth century, colleges organized study by year, so that all first-year students took one set of prescribed courses, all second-year students another, and so on. The pre-professional college teacher, a term I will use henceforth to designate the typical teacher prior to the establishment of the PhD credential, often taught half a dozen subjects, sometimes in widely disparate fields, usually having received only basic college training himself. But in the changing order of knowledge at the end of the nineteenth century, departments of study organized around specialized areas became dominant. At this point, the pre-professional college teacher was phased out and gradually replaced with a new breed of teacher, the expert. The expert was defined by having undertaken advanced study in one special area, credentialized by the PhD. Of course the new job class of professionally credentialed professors with PhDs did not extinguish its predecessor job class of pre-professionals overnight. That took time. No school could make an immediate shift to the PhD model without replacing its

entire faculty – and, in any case, PhDs did not yet exist in adequate numbers for such an immediate large-scale change in the academic labor pool. Instead, institutions grappled with several kinds of models at once. Such material changes in the institutions of higher education and their labor pool are an integral part of how knowledge was produced and defined during these decades.

It was in this culture of reorganized knowledge and redefined professionalism that departments of English were born. They had themselves fought for a place in higher education, becoming standard roughly by the late 1880s after a long battle with the classical curriculum, the prior longstanding model of American education that placed Greek and Latin at the center of college studies. The classical curriculum was dramatically overturned in the late nineteenth century by what were called "modern" subjects, including English and other modern languages. In the parlance of nineteenth-century education, "modern" simply meant "that which is not the classical curriculum." As a new higher-level subject, English validated itself by embracing philology, a "scientific" methodology that took as its subject the linguistic history of English and affiliated languages. The term "science" operated in this era as a rhetorically powerful source of professional authority in many spheres of work. Philology's status as a science was the foundation on which English initially built its professional prestige (Bledstein, 1976; Renker, 1992). But once English departments achieved their own place in the academy, they proved very resistant indeed to subsequent rebels. American literature's attempts to gain its own intellectual turf encountered no greater obstacle than the English departments that housed it.

What is American "Literature"?

In a lecture delivered to the American Literature Group (ALG) of the Modern Language Association in 1926, Franklin B. Snyder of Northwestern University asked the question, "What is American 'Literature'?" Snyder's question had been asked repeatedly for well over a century. Readers and writers lamented the deficiency of American literature, usually comparing it unfavorably to the great literature of England. Literary circles were yawningly familiar with the question of whether or not American literature even existed. The typical response to the question was that, if American literature did exist, it was far inferior to the literature of England. The whole scenario evoked by Snyder's question was thus something of a cliché.

What marked Snyder's talk as different was not the question it asked but the occasion upon which he asked it. The ALG was a new professional organization devoted to fostering the study of American literature. Its formation in 1921 was a first step for American literature toward official recognition in the academy. So even though Snyder's question *per se* was old, the change of venue meant that the question itself had changed.

Focusing on the new venue rather than the old question helps to illustrate my earlier point that the process of identifying and teaching America's "great books"

has never been a function of the mere books themselves, since books are never separate from historical circumstances. Various institutions mediate the relation between books and readers. Beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century, higher education increasingly became a primary institutional site in this process. As John Guillory has penetratingly shown, the school acts as a lens that shapes the books it chooses to teach. We should not be surprised, then, that institutional concerns and factors shaped American literature as it struggled to suit itself to the demands of institutional culture.

Snyder offers a useful glimpse into the specific obstacles American literature faced in trying to make its way into the institution of higher education. Even though he speaks as an advocate for American literature, he describes it as “parochial” and “provincial,” preoccupied by “political and social developments” rather than by “purely artistic creation” (1927: 13). These terms are not unique to Snyder but utterly typical of discussions about American literature. Even American literature’s proponents at that time readily conceded that English literature was aesthetically superior.

Since American literature was universally agreed to fall short in comparison, it needed other forms of validation. In other words, American literature had an image problem. In the 1920s we see the field’s proponents trying to revise its image to build its academic credibility. For Snyder, it was the wealth of political and economic documents found in American writing (Tom Paine, Jefferson, Hamilton) that constituted its valuable literary legacy even though “our civilization has yet produced relatively little fit to stand with the work of the world’s greatest artists” (pp. 13–14). His attempt to redeem American writing by focusing on its historical and political dimensions was, again, a standard approach. High school curricula and the relatively scarce undergraduate classrooms where the subject was taught up to this time presented English literature in terms of literary “greatness,” while American literature was taught more typically in connection with historical contexts. From the standpoint of most college and university English departments, the latter enterprise was intellectually rudimentary and best suited to elementary and high schools.

Lawrence Buell has illuminatingly argued that the emergence of an American literary culture in the mid-nineteenth century, along with the rampant anxieties at the time about inferiority to Britain, is usefully understood as a post-colonial phenomenon. Paul Lauter has also stressed the importance of colonization and decolonization as historical frameworks for considering the general development of culture in the United States (Lauter, 1991: 38). The post-colonial mentality of cultural inferiority to the motherland that saturated discussions about American writing in the nineteenth century restaged itself when these texts became objects of study in English departments, where the powerful culture of anglophilia blocked American literature studies long into the twentieth century.

American literature scholars in fact chronically complained that the field’s place in departments of English, rather than in a department of its own, was American literature’s most formidable obstacle – another excellent example of the shaping power of the institutional lens, and certainly the most influential one on American literature’s

fortunes. By the 1920s, most English departments continued to resist ceding turf, perhaps allowing a token introductory survey course in the subject, but making it clear via curricular requirements that American literature was best, and usually only, suited to a rudimentary place in the curriculum. In a typical course sequence, American literature came right after freshman composition and before the more serious study of English literature that would follow.

The 1920s, the decade of Snyder's talk, was the first decade of professional consolidation for American literature as a new field, consolidations set against the backdrop of this hostile and condescending English Department climate. Other signs of advancing professionalization included the development of scholarly journals (the first one, *The New England Quarterly*, appeared in 1928, followed by *American Literature* in 1929); a push to cultivate doctoral work in the field; and an increasing number of scholarly publications about American literature that tried to define it in a fresh way that would address a new set of cultural demands.

The push to cultivate doctoral work was directly connected to American literature's longstanding image problem as too easy and therefore unworthy of academic standing. One major part of this image problem had long been that no one had a PhD in the subject. Doctoral candidates working in English mostly wrote dissertations either exploring the English language and its history (including many philological dissertations on topics in Anglo-Saxon) or researching the historical details, allusions, and contexts of literary texts, usually no later than the English Renaissance. (In one of my favorite examples of such research, an English seminar at Johns Hopkins assessed which actual marine animals were the likely sources for the fantastical beasts of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.) In keeping with the philological ethos, literary texts were usually treated as linguistic or historical artifacts; interpretation as we know it in today's classrooms was not part of the scholar's work. What made English an appropriately difficult field of study, that is, one worthy of the PhD, was the age, foreignness, and difficulty of the tongue in which it was written (hence the predilection for Anglo-Saxon), not the meaning or interpretive interest of the content of its texts.

Nowadays, when I tell people I am an "English professor," they sometimes ask me whether "English" means the language or the literature. This confusion persists because the field itself has undergone an historical change: "English" departments were born in the 1880s as departments of the English language, considered as an historical phenomenon, and only later, in about the late 1930s, became departments more exclusively focused on interpreting the layers of content of the English words comprising literary texts. (Other approaches fell in between and overlapped with these, as Gerald Graff has discussed.) The linguistic bias that was one of the founding principles of the first English departments created a gigantic obstacle to American literature studies for generations. American literature was not as chronologically old as Anglo-Saxon, and the oral traditions of indigenous peoples did not yet count – only the far more recent written productions of settlers and their descendants. In response to the suggestion that one might think of American literature as a suitable subject for investigation, the typical response from opponents was: How and why would you study books that were

in your own modern everyday language? What on earth would you do with them? As far back as 1887, Albert H. Smyth, a high school teacher, complained in a talk at the MLA convention that opponents of American literature study resisted it for three primary (to Smyth's mind, ridiculous) reasons: it was "perilously modern"; it held no "peculiar attraction to the grammarian"; and the language in which it was written "does not offer stubborn enough resistance to the student to develop and discipline his mental fibre" (Smyth, 1888: 238–9).

These institutional biases against American literature usually meant that the subject entered programs as a kind of poor relation, typically through the interest of a particular faculty member who had been trained in another field but had developed a secondary interest in American literature and was permitted to teach it as a sort of hobby at a suitably rudimentary level of the curriculum. In practical terms, what this meant was that the first generation of doctoral students to write dissertations in American literature topics had to receive their training from scholars who had trained in other areas instead – another reason it was considered a field devoid of expertise. While this situation persisted (and it only started to budge forward in the 1920s), American literature continually came up against resistance from scholars in other fields of English who considered American literature a field so easy that non-specialists could teach it and so unscholarly that anyone who could read English could pick it up as a sideline and teach it to others – conveniently overlooking the fact that the institution itself had created these hostile conditions.

As the number of PhD candidates writing dissertations on American literature topics began to increase in the 1920s, a new scholarly trend toward publication in the field also contributed to its slowly changing credibility. One of the major signs of scholarly progress, although only partial in its success, was the first large-scale cooperative effort by scholars to draw together a compendium of knowledge about American literature as a basis for further specialized work in the field. As Kermit Vanderbilt has explored in detail, three professors at Columbia University organized 60 scholars nationwide to contribute to this comprehensive literary history of America, the multivolume *Cambridge History of American Literature* (CHAL) that appeared between 1917 and 1921.

One of the things it is easy to lose sight of in our own cultural moment is that, before a new field is defined, there is often little established information about authors and texts – or even about which ones might constitute the field. The first wave of scholarship must establish such basic bibliographic matters as which authors published which texts in which years and where those texts could be located. Part of the service of the CHAL was to establish a relatively reliable database about what might comprise "American literature" and to collect scholarly essays addressing what had been found. As Vanderbilt notes, however, reviewers found all the distinct essays and bibliographies by so many contributors to create an uneven result rather than the compelling coherent vision sorely needed to help organize the field.

Even as the 1920s saw forward movement in American literature's academic consolidation through journals, dissertations, and scholarly publications, such a trend had its detractors outside the academy. Among those who vilified "professors" were

John Macy and Van Wyck Brooks, both of whom had been trained at Harvard and who castigated its starchy and anemic vision of literary value. Macy's *The Spirit of American Literature* (1913) and Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915) and "On Creating a Usable Past" (1918) argue that "professors," a group toward whom they felt contempt, taught a dessicated tradition, one that worshiped a dead past. Both thought the problem of American literature was not that it hadn't achieved institutional status but that the limited institutional status it *had* achieved was based on corrupt and moribund ideas, indebted to forces of social conservatism. According to Macy, the teaching of literature at universities, especially at Harvard,

was divided between philologists on the one hand, men with no literary sense, who reduce Shakespeare and Milton to archaeological specimens, and, on the other hand, amiable dilettanti who illustrate the truth of Tanner's epigram: "He who can does; he who cannot teaches."

(Macy, 1913: 100)

For both Macy and Brooks, the university was an enemy of the true spirit of American literature.

Macy and Brooks stand in the teens as the most influential voices calling for a new vision of American literature. The new vision must, in their arguments, define new literary values (to replace the old values of philology and anglophilia) and, in doing so, dethrone the genteel tradition in American literature, the old canon that focused on the excellence of writers such as Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, and Lowell. According to Macy and Brooks, such embalmed models of literary value needed to be overturned in the service of what Brooks called "creating a usable past," by which he meant finding new voices of American power. For Macy, the neglected writers to turn to included Mark Twain, Whitman, Melville, and Thoreau. He noted, for example, that "the ringing revolt of the essay 'Civil Disobedience' is still silenced under the thick respectability of our times" (Brooks, 1918: 173). Macy also noted that writers of excellence like Edith Wharton and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman were not honored as great because of cultural biases against women that were built into the definition of greatness. Looking back in 1948 on the progress of the field in which he had himself played a major part, Howard Mumford Jones (then a professor at Harvard) characterized Macy's book approvingly as a "revolt" (Jones, 1948: 138).

It is also important to note, however briefly, two large-scale historical contexts crucial to understanding revolutionary literary arguments like those of Macy and Brooks. First, they were writing in the decade in which literary modernism as a movement was overturning sensibilities more generally. In this sense, the simmering revolution in the American canon was part of a broader Western reassessment of the category of the literary. Second, both were socialists at a time when socialism in the US was widely embraced by intellectuals. For them, our culture's relation to American literature was intimately related to how America thought about itself and its political and social choices. (It is one of the enduring ironies of the canon wars that the now-"traditional" accounts of American literature were written in many cases by writers who

were political radicals, either professed socialists or otherwise openly sympathetic to socialism: Macy, Brooks, Lewis Mumford, Granville Hicks, Vernon Louis Parrington, F.O. Matthiessen, Daniel Aaron, Newton Arvin, and so on. (See Denning, 1986.) The irony, of course, is that political conservatives of the canon wars in the late twentieth century heatedly defended the “tradition” against what they portrayed as unjust attacks by the left or “tenured radicals.” But the critics who had become the tradition were, in their own day, the political left. The history of the canon is replete with ironies like this one.)

A book responding to the rebels’ cry for a renewed, coherent vision of the meaning of American literature integrated with the concerns of actual life crashed onto the scene in 1927–30: Vernon Louis Parrington’s *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920* (1927–30). Parrington’s book was the most dramatic success of the entire field of American literature to that point, winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1928 and converting scores of acolytes to his approach to American texts. *Main Currents* was unique in that it synthesized the names and dates that had filled the handbooks of American literature and the encyclopedic CHAL and offered instead a coherent vision of the whole of American literature. As Jones recalled later, “who can forget the tingling sense of discovery with which we first read those lucid pages, followed this confident marshaling of masses of stubborn material into position, until book, chapter, and section became as orderly as a regiment on parade!” (Jones, 1948: 141).

In addition to Parrington’s brilliantly learned vision organizing the three centuries of material that had long escaped integration, he eschewed the belletristic as the primary criterion for importance. He thus elegantly and simply dismissed those who opposed American literature on aesthetic grounds by redefining the grounds themselves. In his introduction, he remarked that literary historians of America have labored under the heavy handicap of the “genteel tradition,” seeking “daintier fare than polemics” (Parrington, 1927–30: vi). Literature, for Parrington, was not a world elsewhere but a direct product of the seething forces of everyday life. He focused on socioeconomic forces and intellectual history as the roots of literature, working period by period and region by region with impressive sweep and detail. As already noted, Parrington was himself a political liberal; when he used the term “liberal,” he defined it by way of the history of political philosophy, in which liberalism emerged as a revolutionary doctrine of individual rights that aimed to free the individual from subjection to external corporate authorities, primarily the church and state. Parrington was most interested in tracing the influence on America of liberal traditions from the old world and on how they gave rise to a new democratic psychology. Like all powerful new paradigms, *Main Currents* would give rise to vituperative opposition in the coming decades.

Shortly after the publication of Parrington’s first volume, another highly influential academic study appeared: Norman Foerster’s *The Reinterpretation of American Literature* (1928), collecting essays by many of the central early scholars in the field. Foerster frames the volume by arguing that American literature is at a crucial turning point, changing from “a subject attractive to facile journalists and ignorant dilettanti, and

repellent to sound but timorous scholars" into a study "pursued in the same spirit and with the same methods employed in the study of other modern literatures" (Foerster, 1928: viii). In that spirit, he attempted to organize the "disordered interpretation of American literature" (p. 26) around key topics, arguing that the field should address these systematically: the Puritan tradition, the frontier spirit, romanticism, and realism. In this sense, like *Main Currents*, *The Reinterpretation of American Literature* tried to reign in the chaotic morass of the handbooks and of the CHAL and to organize scholars around a key set of terms and issues that could then be more fruitfully explored. The change in American literature's status that this "reinterpretation" would help to produce required not just interpretive but institutional changes; according to Foerster, more appropriate training for PhDs in the field was especially urgent. "At present, this training may be characterized as vague and aimless, partly because behind it lies an inadequate interpretation of American literature – if, indeed, any interpretation at all – and partly because the subject has traditionally been embraced within the department of English literature," where American literature is treated as a sideline or as a mere hobby only to be tolerated (Foerster, 1928: x–xi).

Fred Lewis Pattee, one of the very earliest professors specializing in American literature (dating back to the 1890s), includes an essay in Foerster's volume that summarizes accounts of American literature to that point and identifies problems yet to be solved. According to Pattee, the hundreds of histories of American literature produced prior to the late 1920s (most of which were textbooks) were built on a single model, a breakdown into standard periods (Colonial, Revolutionary, Knickerbocker, and so on) and a standard list of authors (from Captain John Smith through the Fireside Poets). "But the really stereotyped thing about these histories," complains Pattee, "is their critical method," always the same list of biographical facts and the same well-worn myths (Pattee, 1928: 3). (As Nina Baym has shown, these standard textbooks were part of a civic project to instill cultural unity in a diverse population by disseminating standard myths about the nation via schools and textbooks.)

The new history of American literature that Pattee calls for is to be one specifically written *as* a history and not for classroom use. He writes, "If professors *can* use it as a textbook let them, but it must be detached from class-room thinking" (Pattee, 1928: 6). As Graff points out, Pattee is a particularly interesting figure in the history of American literature studies. His career spanned the preprofessional and professional periods and the record of his tastes illuminatingly reflects the conflicts between the two (Graff, 1987: 213). One of the most massive transformations Pattee witnessed was the shift in conceptions of American literature from essentially a classroom subject (covered by standard textbooks addressed primarily to a lower- and high-school audience) to a scholarly subject that required fresh investigation, new definition, and aggressive, intensive scholarship. His essay in Foerster's volume calls attention to this transition. At this point, argues Pattee, we must stop writing big textbook histories of the field, especially those, like the hundreds in existence by this point, that recycled the same periods and myths about authors; we need to focus instead on acquiring reliable primary materials (which the CHAL had tried to map out in its extensive bibliographies),

assessing them via judicious scholarship, and developing a new account of American literature.

The new history that Pattee envisioned was one whose title and guiding concept, he argued, should be *A Literary History of the American People*. He wanted it to cover what he called the “three currents” of American literature: the aristocratic (or elite, or high-brow) strain; the popular strain (like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*); and the mass strain (like dime novels, moving pictures, “the colored Sunday magazine of the daily papers”). The literary history of America, according to Pattee, includes all these phenomena. Although the current state of literary studies in the twenty-first century has swung back toward Pattee’s catholicism, in the short term he would lose this battle for scope. The following two decades in which the field gradually developed a permanent place in the curriculum saw not a broadening but a dramatic narrowing of the canon (Lauter, 1991).

Although American literature had made important advances in the 1920s like those just summarized, scholars working in American literature still complained of institutional obstacles for years to come. In 1936, Jones (then a professor at the University of Michigan) identified the attitudes of English professors, resistant English department policies, a “lack of hospitality” at the learned journals, and consistent opposition by the MLA in its various institutional dimensions (its journal, its choice of presidents, and so on) as signs of active hostility to American literature, which he notably called “the orphan child of the curriculum” (Jones, 1936). The significant gains American literature did make were often at less traditional and less elite institutions like Foerster’s University of North Carolina, Pattee’s Penn State University, and Parrington’s University of Washington as well as at women’s colleges like Mount Holyoke and Smith (Graff, 1987; Renker, 1992, 2000, 2007).

The fact that women’s colleges and their teaching staff were among early pioneers of an American literature curriculum is related to broader cultural conceptions of gender and literature. Lauter has argued that nothing was more important to literary intellectuals after World War I than masculinizing American culture. The new professoriate strove to overturn the genteel and feminized literary culture of the nineteenth century that was in part the source of American literature’s image problem (Lauter, 1991, 1994). Indeed, explicit language of masculinity is endemic to scholarly writing of this period. This masculinist rhetoric designates a broad range of intellectual attributes that are considered valuable in part because they oppose allegedly feminine, devalued attributes of taste and intellect. To cite only one among many possible examples, Parrington writes that the model of the genteel tradition prevented historians of American literature from entering “sympathetically into a world of masculine intellects and material struggles” (Parrington, 1927–30: vi).

It is in this context of preoccupations with masculinity that Lauter places the major canon shift in the 1920s, from the genteel tradition of Longfellow that valued anglophilia and taste to the modernist-inspired tradition that valued the exiled artist who set himself against mass culture. The rise of Melville’s reputation in the 1920s was part of this shift (Lauter, 1994). (One good indication of Pattee’s place on the cusp between traditions is his estimation of Melville, the most notable product of the new field as

invented in the twenties. Pattee notes in *The Reinterpretation of American Literature*, "We have seen of late a sudden change in the estimate of Melville: which valuation is right, the old or the new?" (Pattee, 1928: 7–8). When he returned to the question of Melville in 1934, Pattee's outdated taste showed itself: "Melville, I prophesy, will wane back to the fifth magnitude to which his own generation adjudged him" (Pattee, 1934: 380). Whereas prior to the turn of the twentieth century a great deal of taste-making had been centered in the female readership that drove many of the decisions at the periodicals and publishing houses (a readership to which Pattee was sympathetic), by the 1920s the universities were increasingly the center of literary authority in the United States (Lauter, 1991). They had become the new canon-makers.

Although American literature, as discussed earlier, was not susceptible to the scientific method of linguistic analysis as practiced by the philologists and was further marred by its image of cultural inferiority to Britain, forces external to the curriculum finally gave the field the unstoppable rationale it needed to justify itself. The surge of democratic ideology at the start of World War II produced a powerful opportunity to reinterpret the importance of American literature, in both masculinized and nationalistic terms. While the patriotism surrounding World War I had facilitated provisional gains for American literature studies, World War II produced an outpouring of interest in the topic, both domestically and abroad. More than any other single factor, nationalism pushed American literature into the curriculum.

This new cultural moment created yet another opportunity to reinvent American literature and to establish a new canon growing out of the changes percolating since the 1920s. Contra Parrington with his capacious survey of three centuries of American writing, F.O. Matthiessen in 1941 published *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, which took as its subject only a half decade, 1850–5, and only five authors: Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman. Matthiessen's vision of a phenomenon called the "American Renaissance" (although variations of this term had been used by earlier scholars) and of the very limited number of major writers it included was to catalyze and dominate the American literature syllabus for the following four decades.

Matthiessen's seminal study represented at least two important shifts in accounts of American literature. First, it rejected what had come to be considered by this point the Parringtonian position: that is, that literature was a product of socioeconomic forces. Many opponents of Parrington resented and criticized this view, especially for what they believed to be his implication that the individual artist lacked agency amidst a morass of social forces. Critics felt that Parrington minimized the power of the individual artist to oppose, rather than merely to emblemize, the dominant society. Second, Matthiessen focused specifically on the artistry of American Renaissance texts.

By inventing new sociohistorical criteria, Parrington had rendered null the opposition to American literature that claimed it was aesthetically inadequate. Later critics resented Parrington for making "belletristic" a dirty word. Matthiessen confronted the aesthetic critics on their own intellectual turf, making an extended case for the artistry

of his five writers and going so far as to metaphorically link them by way of his title with the unchallenged greats of the English Renaissance. He introduced his study by expressing his admiration for Parrington's literary history but rejecting the path taken by Parrington's intellectual followers, who, according to Matthiessen, continued to see art as merely a part of history and in so doing to dismiss the importance of aesthetics. It was this heretofore unconquered territory – the artistry of American literature – that Matthiessen sought to conquer, and did. From the standpoint of the twentieth century taken as a whole, the redefinition Foerster had called for in 1928 turned out to be, most lastingly, Matthiessen's.

It was not only Matthiessen's aesthetic focus that invigorated American literature studies. The thematic center of *American Renaissance* was what Matthiessen called the "devotion" of all five of his writers to "the possibilities of democracy" (Matthiessen, 1941: ix). He presented the American Renaissance texts as "literature for our democracy" and challenged the nation to repossess them (Matthiessen, 1941: xv). Published just as World War II was transforming the United States and the world, his book was perfectly poised to act as a foundation for the boom in American literature studies that would gain momentum during and after the 1940s. Matthiessen's model of literature's intimate relation to democracy became a textbook for the postwar redefinition of the field.

In the midst of the postwar boom, Jones opened his *The Theory of American Literature* (1948) with a lament that literary history as a form of scholarship had become unpopular in favor of "criticism," by which term he meant ahistorical textual analysis of the kind students today know as "close reading." This new methodology of "criticism" eventually became widely known as the "New Criticism." It took shape as a method in the 1930s as one among many possible approaches to literary texts; but from roughly 1940 through 1980, and, some would say, well beyond that, the New Criticism became the single most influential method in the teaching done by English departments. Graff traces at length the New Criticism's origins as a method that, while it placed aesthetic concerns at the center of literary analysis, was not in its original conception meant to situate literature in a vacuum that looked only at the art object. That was the method's eventual fate in practice, as scholar after scholar explicated the same texts producing an endless series of "readings" that addressed only the text with little outside context. This methodology is also sometimes called "formalist" because of its focus on literary form and technique – in the mind of its detractors, at the expense of other more pressing concerns.

Jones's lament notwithstanding, this sea-change in dominant critical methodologies from "literary history" to "criticism" facilitated the postwar boom in cultural nationalism, to produce a new surge of studies in American literature. These combined a focus on the aesthetic greatness of American texts with cultural contexts of various kinds. Graff argues that American literature studies was unusual in that its applications of New Critical methodology actually retained some of New Criticism's original interest in culture, rather than a mere ahistorical textual explication. Such studies included, in addition to Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*, such works as Henry Nash Smith,

Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (1950); R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955); Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957); Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964); and Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (1966). At their centers were such culturally formative notions as the frontier (Smith), the innocence and newness of the American experiment (Lewis), romance as a flight from the actualities of the social world (Chase, Fiedler), the growth of technology (Marx), the relation of national to personal consciousness as evidenced by style (Poirier), and so on.

All these studies shared an enthusiastic focus on what was distinctively "American" about American literature. Like Parrington's *Main Currents*, they were organized around coherent visions of American literature, precisely what the old handbooks had lacked; but, unlike *Main Currents*, this new generation of works no longer derided the "belletristic." They treated American literature as a rich body of work in its own right, for which denigrating comparisons to British literature were no longer required. In fact, assessing and celebrating what was uniquely "American" about the artistry of American literature became a new scholarly enterprise that rapidly gained momentum in scholarship and in the classroom. After such long vassalage to British literature more generally and in English departments in particular, American literature staked an intellectual argument that came to be described as "American exceptionalism," in which, rather than a lesser offshoot of British literature, American literature was wholly distinct from it. Words like "Americanness" and "originality" are common in these studies as the generation of postwar critics claims its own virgin land. Later scholars, beyond the scope of this chapter, would see the error of exceptionalism, but in its own historical moment it served a crucial intellectual – and institutional – purpose. (Michael Denning's trenchant assessment of American exceptionalism is especially illuminating about its motivations and costs.)

The process of academicizing that American literature went through is a process that all new fields undergo, although the particular ways they are eventually validated might differ. In our own cultural moment, for example, other fields are now in the position of newcomer and face the same challenges from the more established fields – which now include American literature – to define their scope, devise curricula, develop journals, produce graduate students and specialists, and generate dissertations. Within the last three decades or so we have seen women's studies, black studies, and gay and lesbian studies successfully negotiate this terrain (all changing their names multiple times in the process of doing so, one sign of territorial negotiation); at present, areas like disability studies, digital media studies, and eco-criticism are among the new fields, and will follow a similar path.

American literature's own trajectory of institutional change is still in flux. From the nineteenth-century handbooks of American literature through Pattee and Parrington, American literature was a body of hundreds of texts by a vast number of authors. By the time of *American Renaissance* the canon had been redefined significantly, in number, choice of authors, and nature of literary value. Seeing this narrowing trend in process

in 1934, Pattee wrote, "It seems to be the fashion now to exclude from the roll of American authors of major importance all who were not condemners of the conventional, damners of Puritanism, shockers of *boi polloi* readers who are old-fashioned in taste and morals" (Pattee, 1934: 379). In the past 25 years in particular, the American canon has once again expanded dramatically. The label "American literature" has itself become contested in favor of such alternatives as "Colonial and US Literature" or "American literatures" or perhaps "Literature of North America." American literature is still mostly housed in English departments, still mostly a lesser cousin, still negotiating, in somewhat different terms, its place in the curriculum. The field and the texts it teaches are still embedded in historical processes and cultural agendas. They always have been.

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Cold War and Culture War

Christopher Newfield

Without the Cold War, What is the point of being an American?

(John Updike, *Rabbit at Rest*)

The term “Cold War” refers to the conflict that emerged at the end of World War II between two international power blocs, roughly identified as capitalist and Communist, and led respectively by the United States and the Soviet Union. The Cold War began in the mid-1940s, when these two World War II allies, having fought together against multiple military conquests conducted by the fascist governments of Germany, Italy, and Japan, turned on each other in a struggle for territorial, political, and ideological ascendancy. This struggle continued until the Soviet Union dismantled itself in the early 1990s.

The Cold War divided Europe into Western and Eastern halves, similarly divided the Asian countries of Korea and Vietnam, generated proxy wars in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, and induced each side to try to absorb “Third World” or non-aligned nations into its bloc through means ranging from extensive foreign aid to military coups d’état. This binary division rapidly encompassed the entire world, which came to be described as two apparently antithetical camps (the capitalist First World and the Communist Second World). The Cold War produced an unending series of competitions for the allegiance of all other countries (mostly lumped together as the “Third World”), generated armed conflicts on almost every continent, and transformed the internal political rivalries of many societies into civil wars. From the point of view of the West, the Cold War was fought on three distinct fronts: against the Soviet-led Communist world (the “Second World”); for the allegiance of the “Third World,” most of which was poor and in the 1940s often still European colonies; and for the loyalty of the populations of the “First World” in Europe and especially the United States. The “Cold” War is thus a widely-used term that is also something of a misnomer, for it names a conflict that produced a continuing series of hot wars and their usual mayhem all over the world. One count locates US interventions in more

than 70 countries in the 1945–90 period; similar Soviet and Chinese actions added significantly to the overall number.

Not only did the Cold War last for 45 years, or more than ten times longer than World War II, but it enlisted cultural and social factors more thoroughly than previous conventional wars had done. The Cold War transformed political and economic differences into grand divisions between total philosophies and entire ways of life. In this chapter, we will focus on the “cold” aspects of the Cold War, those that focused on non-military – though often coercive – campaigns to reshape national cultures and political connections in relation to the grand global conflict. We will also examine the continuing influence of the Cold War on American public life.

From Concept to System

The Cold War’s geography was effectively established by the Yalta Conference of February 1945, where Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the heads of the British and the United States governments, agreed to an East–West division of post-war Europe with their Soviet counterpart Josef Stalin. The Cold War began in earnest around 1946, as the US and its former ally the USSR became openly antagonistic and began to divide Western and Eastern Europe into two polarized camps. It can be divided into several distinct periods: 1) “Cold War I,” the “classic” period that lasted for nearly a quarter-century between the end of World War II and the late 1960s, when the Vietnam “quagmire” and widespread public opposition forced a change of American policy; 2) A “détente” period developed during three years of negotiations between the Nixon Administration and the Brezhnev government that led to the SALT I arms-limitation treaty of May 1972; 3) “Cold War II,” which began with the arrival of Ronald Reagan in the White House in 1981, and which was marked by an escalation of competition with the Soviet Union designed to overload its economy and political system. The end of the Cold War is normally dated by the end of the Soviet Union itself in 1991, when that entity dissolved into the independent countries of Russia and many smaller nations ranging from the Baltic states and Belarus to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia.

Once the division of Europe had begun, the frameworks of the struggle evolved at war-like speed. The term itself – Cold War – was allegedly “reinvented by the American financier, diplomat Bernard Baruch, who claimed to have heard it from a vagrant sitting on a bench in Central Park sometime in 1946.”¹ In that same year, the most powerful image for an absolute division of the globe into two separate worlds came from Britain’s wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who traveled in retirement to Westminster College in Missouri where he described the boundary within a newly divided Europe as an “iron curtain.”² Only a year after the end of World War II, Churchill declared the peace to be superficial and temporary: a “shadow has fallen on the scenes so lately lighted by the Allied victory. . . . From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that

line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere.”

Equally importantly, Churchill laid the foundation for the domestic and cultural dimension of the Cold War when he warned that the threat took the form of internal subversion: “throughout the world, Communist fifth columns are established and work in complete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the Communist center . . . The Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization.”

It was in an atmosphere in which former war leaders freely generalized from local conflicts to a global struggle that, in the spring of 1947, President Truman escalated a call for funds to support the royal Greek government against Communist rebels into what became known as the Truman Doctrine (or the “containment” doctrine). Truman committed the United States to going anywhere in the world to help people fight for their freedom against Communist subjugators.³ At about the same time, Secretary of State George Marshall offered the “Marshall Plan” to Europe, economic aid designed to create a rebuilt, modernized, fortified, and solidly anticommunist Western Europe.⁴ In July 1947, Congress passed the National Security Act, which renewed wartime provisions for military coordination, classified military research, industry contracting with the Pentagon, and intelligence gathering. It unified military command under a new Department of Defense, and established both the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency.⁵ Also in that busy year, the Cold War’s cultural front began in earnest with Congressional hearings on Communist influence over Hollywood films. The formal partition of Germany into two separate nations, the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union’s blockade of West Berlin, all in 1948, prompted among other things the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949, which formalized the status of the capitalist West as a military bloc. In that year, the Soviet bloc was enormously strengthened when China fell to the Communist insurgency led by Mao Tse-Tung. 1949 also saw the Cold War escalate into a nuclear standoff when the Soviets successfully detonated their first atom bomb; the prospect of a nuclear weapons exchange with millions of casualties became a central feature of Cold War experience and diplomacy. In 1950, North Korea, with Stalin’s consent, invaded South Korea, starting the Korean War that would involve China and drag on until 1953. By the end of the 1940s, and within four years of the signing of the treaties ending World War II, a global Cold War was firmly in place.

Cold War policy stayed largely true to the structure of Churchill’s “iron curtain” address and Truman’s 1947 speech to Congress on Greece and Turkey: the world had only two sides, one “slave” and the other “free.” This radically binary or “Manichean” thinking was written into American policy documents. National Security Council memo, NSC-68, referring to the Soviet Union, held that “the implacable purpose of the slave state to eliminate the challenge of freedom has placed the two great powers at opposite poles.”⁶

If the United States saw the Soviet Union as its absolute opposite, the feeling was generally mutual. The Soviet ambassador to the United States, Nikolai Novikov, began a long telegram to his superiors by writing, "The foreign policy of the United States, which reflects the imperialist tendencies of American monopolistic capital, is characterized in the postwar period by a striving for world supremacy."⁷ The contrast was so stark that two philosophies were commonly described as two worlds, the "free world" and the "Communist world." On the home front, this contrast often became "American" vs. "un-American," and the latter term was famously institutionalized in the "House Un-American Activities Committee" (HUAC), which conducted many of the best known investigations of alleged Communist sympathizers in government and elsewhere.

Though binary thinking is common in politics as in life in general, the Cold War crystallized it into an American habit of public thought with nearly universal application. One casualty was the decolonization movement in what came to be called the Third World. Decolonization was often regarded in the United States as a Communist front rather than a cruelly-delayed version of the country's own Boston Tea Party and War of Independence. Such thinking inclined American policy-makers to regard non-aligned leaders with so much suspicion that they conspired to overthrow them, even in cases when they were among the first freely elected leaders in their countries' modern history. The Eisenhower administration supported coups against elected leaders in Iran (1953) and Guatemala (1954). The pattern would continue in countries ranging from the Congo (1960), to the Dominican Republic (1963) and Indonesia (1965) to Chile (1974) and several Central American countries (1980s). The most famous of these interventions was the decade-long war in Vietnam: the US had begun to support the French in 1953, at a time when the eventual leader of the Viet Cong, Ho Chi Minh, a military officer fond of quoting the American Declaration of Independence on his struggle's behalf was engaged in resisting the French occupation ; the US escalated its presence in 1965, and fully withdrew in defeat from Saigon in 1975. After a decade of "détente" and de-escalation of superpower tensions, President Ronald Reagan formally rekindled what some historians call Cold War II with his so-called "evil empire" speech of 1982, in which he identified "a great revolutionary crisis . . . not in the free, non-Marxist West but in the home of Marxism-Leninism, the Soviet Union," where "the Soviet Union . . . runs against the tide of history by denying human freedom and human dignity to its citizens."⁸

A Cultural War

The often quite destructive shooting wars of the Cold War period were largely confined to poor countries on the periphery of the North Atlantic world. In terms of the direct experience of the citizens of the First and Second worlds, the Cold War was fought primarily by political, legal, and cultural means.

Leaders on both sides saw the Cold War as an epic struggle between two antithetical ways of life, and thus saturated their populations with its intellectual, psychological, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions. Contemporaries called the Cold War a War of ideas, a struggle for the minds and wills of men, a thought war, a campaign of truth, a war of words, political warfare, nerve warfare, and indirect aggression.⁹ Early in his first term, Dwight W. Eisenhower told the Minneapolis Junior Chamber of Commerce that

The struggle in which freedom today is engaged is quite literally a total and universal struggle. It engages every aspect of our lives. It is waged in every arena in which a challenged civilization must fight to live. It is a military struggle. . . . It is an economic struggle . . . it is a political struggle. It is a scientific struggle . . . It is an intellectual struggle . . . It is a spiritual struggle."¹⁰

He concluded that "A total struggle – let us never forget it – calls for total defense. As there is no weapon too small, no arena too remote, to be ignored, there is no free nation too humble to be forgotten."

The view that, unlike an ordinary war, the Cold War summoned every member and every aspect of society, was not only the conceit of leading politicians and journalists but was codified as US foreign policy. In its first meetings in late 1947, the newly-minted National Security Council instituted the "immediate strengthening and coordination of all foreign information measures of the US Government designed to influence attitudes in foreign countries in a direction favorable to the attainment of its objectives and to counteract effects of anti-US propaganda." It also sanctioned "covert psychological operations abroad" against a Soviet threat it saw as more than simply military.¹¹ The US government offered financial and logistical support, sometimes secretly, to demonstrate American cultural power and send appropriate images of the "American way of life" around the world.¹² The Cold War, in short, was from beginning to end a *cultural war*, for it combined military power, diplomacy, economic leverage, collective attitudes, and world views in an effort to win the populations' "hearts and minds." Although all wars involve cultural elements, the Cold War was distinctive for the way in which its cultural elements propelled and shaped its geopolitical and economic aims.

The most visible expressions of Cold War culture came from film and television, American "mass culture" as it was called then. Although dissent was not unknown, the networks and studios in general signed up to help the war on Communism with stereotyped depictions of a shadowy but lethal anti-American threat that bore no relation to real debates about the value of Soviet – to say nothing of socialist – economic and social policy. William Wellman directed the first film of the Cold War, appropriately entitled *The Iron Curtain* (1948).¹³ By the mid-1950s, Hollywood had produced over fifty films explicitly dealing with the Cold War, some featuring major wartime stars like John Wayne returning to Hawaii to hunt Communist spies while chafing against American civil liberties (*Big Jim McLain*, 1952). Anticomunist themes appeared in every Hollywood genre, including crime (*Pickup On South Street*, 1953), science-fiction

(*The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956), the thriller (*Night People*, 1954), the horror film (*Them*, 1954), and perhaps most importantly, the Western. Most Westerns depicted a world of self-reliant white settlers beset by primitive, godless, duplicitous, cowardly savages who understood nothing but force. Peace depended on a continuous military buildup and constant vigilance.¹⁴ Although some Hollywood depictions of the Cold War world were quite nuanced (*Berlin Express*, 1948; *The Manchurian Candidate*, 1962), most were dogmatically anticommunist. On balance, the studios taught a generation of moviegoers that America faced an implacable, unreasoning enemy that had riddled the country with subversives working toward its overthrow, thus requiring of all loyal Americans a wartime respect for authority, a suspicion of unusual people or ideas, and a willingness to perceive and report suspicious behavior.¹⁵

The culture industries helped demonize Communists, homosexuals, and other alleged internal threats to American life. But legal and political means were also available to expose, stigmatize, prosecute, persecute, and punish such threats: books, film, and television were also arguably most important for articulating the positive ideals for which America stood. Cold War culture formed and reformed American national identity, helping to tell Americans who they were as essential to their knowing what they fought for. For the first half of the 1940s they had fought Nazism and fascism: now they were fighting the apparent opposite, Communism. This new fight had not only to express foreign policy viewpoints and economic theories but the nation's consciousness of its historical destiny. Critique and propaganda were not enough. The Cold War period excelled at the construction of a powerful – though highly restrictive – vision of the American citizen and the American mission.

Acts of Repression

The US had a history of fear of internal sedition and a history of suppressing its potential sources that hailed back to the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798.¹⁶ Similar measures were imposed from time to time, notably during the Civil War and World War I, though they were often struck down or ignored. Cold War fears for national security renewed forms of surveillance, infiltration, and harassment that violated constitutional protections of freedom of speech and political association. Chief among legislative means was the Internal Security Act (“McCarran Act”) of 1947, passed by a humiliating margin over President Truman's veto, which required the registration of Communist and “Communist-front” organizations. It was used as a general hunting license of groups and individuals deemed “subversive” or “un-American,” to use the terms of the legislation.¹⁷ Many used the term “witch hunt” to describe efforts on the part of authorities to arouse popular fury against individuals by casting them as grave threats to public safety.

Among the most famous cases were those of the “Hollywood Ten,” a group of film industry directors, actors, and screenwriters who were called before HUAC to testify about relationships – theirs and their associates – to the Communist Party. HUAC

interviewed 41 “friendly witnesses” who named 16 others, including Bertold Brecht, who testified and then left the United States permanently for East Germany (where he proceeded to criticize the Soviet regime). Ten refused to testify on constitutional grounds. They were eventually convicted of contempt of Congress and were each sentenced to up to a year in prison.¹⁸ In November, 1947, the heads of Hollywood’s major studios met at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York, where they signed a document stating that they would not rehire any of the ten until each had “purged himself of contempt and declares under oath that he is not a Communist.”¹⁹ The studio bosses also stated their refusal to knowingly hire a Communist or a member of any other subversive group, and in so doing created the Hollywood blacklist, only ten percent of whose members ever worked in Hollywood again.²⁰

The late 1940s and early 1950s produced a series of such episodes: Whittaker Chambers denouncing Alger Hiss, a state department official, as a former Communist comrade (1949); the requirement that University of California employees take a loyalty oath to the United States government and that Communists be regarded as ineligible for faculty employment;²¹ Senator Joseph McCarthy’s allegations that the State Department and other government agencies were rife with Communists, and who, when met with demands for evidence, replied only with further allegations (1950–3); and the Rosenberg “atom spy” trial and double execution (1953).

These were the spectacular surfaces of more pervasive practices of labeling whole ranges of behaviors and identities as dangerous, often the outcome of what many at the time called the “witch hunt.” Some people and institutions were subject to perpetual spying and investigation. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was at the center of much of this activity. He had a standing arrangement with Ronald Reagan, as president of the Screen Actors’ Guild, that Reagan would communicate the names of possibly disloyal actors. He set up a similar network to report on college and university personnel in 1951, and began a campaign to discredit UC Berkeley chancellor (and later, UC President) Clark Kerr when Kerr declined to be the “contact person” for the California state version of HUAC. When students protested the hearings conducted by the California HUAC in 1960, Hoover blamed the protests on Communist infiltration in a pamphlet entitled, “Communist Target – Youth: Communist Infiltration and Agitation Tactics,” which Ronald Reagan admired so much that he wrote Hoover offering to turn it into a movie. Secret investigations were a way of life for American law enforcement. They helped make civil liberties seem a danger to national stability, a weakness rather than a strength.

American Cold War culture stigmatized socialism and “industrial democracy,” and even moderate unionism along with them. Historically, much American labor thinking had absorbed both democratic and socialist ideals in concepts such as collective bargaining and workplace self-management. Though the former was partially supported through legislation and union movements, the latter, and related ideas such as labor-executive co-management and the reduction of “command-and-control,” remained off limits. Under continuing Cold War political pressures, unions purged Communist and radical leaders and abandoned most of their demands for managerial

influence and shop-floor autonomy, focusing instead on “bread-and-butter” issues like higher wages.²² Cold War discourse removed previously familiar forms of economic and workplace democracy from the political mainstream, and cast socialist alternatives as anti-American.

Similar fates befell the African-American civil rights movement at home and decolonization abroad. American Communists had been among the pioneers of multi-racial labor unions before World War II; some black civil rights leaders had also been Communists, the great historian, writer, and activist W.E.B. Du Bois among them. But Cold War binarisms encouraged the association of the quest for racial and economic justice with worldwide Communist expansion. At various points, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover attempted to block the civil rights movement by describing many of its leaders and members as Communist sympathizers.²³ Hoover helped legitimize a climate in which black political radicals who advocated world peace, and/or complimented aspects of Soviet life or policy, and/or supported decolonization movements, were treated as opponents of the American government. The most prominent cases included the passport revocations of the gifted and hugely popular entertainer Paul Robeson, who had used his broad cross-racial appeal to lift troop morale throughout World War II, and of W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the most distinguished intellectuals and activists in American history. (When Du Bois lost his passport he was 84 years old. When it was returned in 1958, he left the country and spent his final years in exile in newly independent Ghana.) Some American leaders, including President John F. Kennedy, threatened Martin Luther King and others with a withdrawal of support for civil rights initiatives if they could not demonstrate anticommunist credentials.²⁴

The Cold War was used to justify discrimination not only against Communists, black leaders, civil rights workers, political dissenters, and labor organizers: a number of government employees in the period received letters saying, “Information has come to the attention of the Civil Service Commission that you are a homosexual. What comment do you care to make?” The historian David K. Johnson has found that at least as many homosexuals lost their jobs as political radicals during this period. “In popular discourse,” he notes, “Communists and homosexuals were often conflated. Both groups were perceived as hidden subcultures with their own meeting places, literature, cultural codes, and bonds of loyalty. Both groups were thought to recruit to their ranks the psychologically weak or disturbed. And both groups were considered immoral and godless. Many people believed that the two groups were working together to undermine the government.” Homosexuals could be used by Communists because they were susceptible to blackmail, but also because they “(especially effeminate gay men) acted as a fifth column, by preventing family formation and fostering moral decay.”²⁵

Such practices, both public and anonymous, made political and legal crackdowns central to American life. Some historians believe that the real target of the general ensemble of tactics known as “McCarthyism” was liberalism rather than Communism, meaning the New Deal expansion of public services, employment assistance, and business regulation that was still enormously popular in the country at large. Regardless of

which targets were primary, the outcome was not the free and inclusive public culture for which the country was ostensibly fighting. Contemporary accounts instead describe a nation of paranoia and dread, if not of spies and informers, and stress the anxiety, suspicion, and confusion of the period. The fear of subversion, the angry denunciations of former colleagues and friends, the growing contempt for dissent, the informal but powerful intimidation of political and intellectual expression amounted to a form of extralegal coercion, one described in no statute book but increasingly influential in shaping the American world view.

The Invention of Affluence

The central component of the positive vision of the American way of life was “the affluent society.” In the title of the economist John Kenneth Galbraith’s best-selling 1958 book by that name, affluence referred not to high incomes alone, but to a whole-sale definition of the good society as devoted to the consumption of an ever-renewing stream of products. Within the system of Cold War affluence, the good society was first and foremost a consumer society: its key features were abundance, leisure, and an aura of pleasure or at least contentment brought about by life as a consumer.

The Cold War period saw the creation of the first mass middle class in American history. It came into being for a simple reason: high annual economic growth during “Cold War I,” which ended in the 1970s, was distributed more or less evenly across all income levels. The bottom fifth of the income scale saw its incomes grow about three percent annually between 1947 and 1973, and other quintiles grew only slightly more slowly. Non-supervisory wages grew faster than they have before or since, and income was broadly distributed through relatively high salaries and salary growth, and not just through tax-based forms of redistribution. Cold War I is now seen in retrospect as an economic “golden age”; income increases were not of the “trickle down” variety that characterized the Reagan era and “Cold War II,” in which growth rates for the bottom 20 percent fell to zero, and the middle quintiles’ growth rates were about one-third that of the top five percent. Cold War income distribution was more egalitarian than at any other time in US history, and overall growth rates – perhaps not coincidentally – were also higher.²⁶ Many observers attribute this situation both to the strength of labor, whose wage demands had broad popular support, and to the specter of Communism, which could act as an egalitarian conscience even for those anti-Communist leaders who repudiated every aspect of its example.

Abundance served a powerful ideological purpose as well. It formed the cornerstone of the argument for the overall capitalist system’s categorical superiority to Communism. A major symbolic triumph for this model occurred during the “kitchen debates,” when Vice-President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Khrushchev faced off in a model American kitchen and argued about the relative benefits of the two systems. Nixon proclaimed, “To us, diversity, the right to choose . . . is the most important thing. We don’t have one decision made at the top by one government official . . . We

have many different manufacturers and many different kinds of washing machines so that the housewives have a choice . . . Would it not be better to compete in the relative merits of washing machines than in the strength of rockets?"²⁷ Affluence meant both better products and more product choice, and helped redefine democracy as consumption, the latter being the Cold War's most potent symbol of American superiority.

Affluence had a specific geography, and that was the white suburb. The suburbs were in no small part created by their television image: while film was the medium of urban fear, television was the medium of suburban idyll. Shows like *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *Father Knows Best* helped create the period's baseline norms for America's version of the classless society, the white middle class. Father commuted to some kind of management job and was an amiable, relaxed, slightly distant, but authoritative presence. His principal role was as breadwinner, and his job paid well enough to allow him to support the family on one income. Mother was a full-time housewife and nurturer who upheld routine law-and-order with the kids. In 1945, *House Beautiful* issued her marching orders in an article entitled "Home Should Be Even More Wonderful Than He Remembers It." The returning vet, the wife was told, is "head man again. Your part in the remaking of this man is to fit his home to him, understanding why he wants it this way, forgetting your own preferences." These images were often belied by reality – for example, very few women of color ever had the economic option of staying home to keep house. But these images were broadcast so ceaselessly at home and around the world, and had so genuine a basis in a rapidly improving, governmentally supported economy, that they rapidly came to define the public image of American life.

No less crucially, the standard suburb was racially white. The Cold War posited not only a unified political system but a single American culture, one with an Anglo-Saxon core to which newcomers to American society would eventually assimilate. This period's representative public policy analysis was *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, both of whom went on to advocate policies that envisioned blacks being absorbed into mainstream society one at a time, on the basis of "individual achievement," and to oppose policies that attempted to improve the economic and social conditions of blacks as a group on the grounds that they had been targets of discrimination as a group.²⁸ Anglo-American chauvinism – a kind of white cultural supremacism – played a role in bolstering disdain for the Soviet Union.

The good neighborhood was also depoliticized: adults as much as children were sheltered from any kind of social force, political issue, or public controversy. Public space had been not so much formally privatized as simply replaced by private life. Social problems were reduced to minor domestic disputes and disappointments that could always be resolved with maternal benevolence backed by the pater noster's benign command, issued after work to children who were meanwhile told to "wait until your father gets home." The televisual suburb was run by fathers who fulfilled Tocqueville's nineteenth-century prophecy that America would be run by a "benevolent schoolmaster." It was a kind of Oz, whose inhabitants, "unbothered by poverty, served by proper machines in lovely gardens, cared for by a benevolent political order . . . were

able to concentrate on the business of living, which for them was the life of emotion and imagination – and having adventures.”²⁹

The Oz heartland was California, and during the 1950s the Golden State became the incarnation of the American dream. The national media trumpeted “The Western Way of Life,” “a palm-shaded ‘pad’ with a patio, ten dollars down, 100 years to pay.” In California, a new California suburbanite told *Look* magazine in 1960, “pleasure and comfort come first . . . And work is simply what pays for it . . . Living is easier and informal and the kids eat up the outdoor life. We all do get more sheer pleasure out of being alive.” California living was “lotus land on the installment plan” – the paradise available to anyone that Russians could only dream about.

The suburbs fulfilled the American dream defined as quasi-universal access to a consumer’s paradise. The years between 1945 and 1960 saw economic developments without precedent in American history. Average real incomes rose to twice their 1929 levels. Television rose from a 0 percent to a 90 percent presence in the American household. Consumer credit expanded by 800 percent. Shopping centers grew from 8 to 3,840 nationwide. Auto production increased four-fold. Home ownership was up 50 percent and the suburbs grew six times faster than cities. And throughout this period the suburban population was 95 percent white.

Affluence tied its specific social expression – the white suburb – to a mandatory source: “free enterprise,” meaning in practice a form of capitalism in which all major investment and production decisions were made by executives rather than through joint decisions with employees and governments. We can appreciate the importance of this change only by remembering the economic turbulence of the preceding decades. Generations of workers had protested, struck, unionized, and in general disputed the separation of labor from management and the right of business owners to run their companies and the economy as they saw fit. Skepticism about the wisdom as well as the justice of capitalist economic management was abundantly confirmed by the Great Depression, in which the collective wisdom of American business leaders deepened the crisis until the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 brought a gradual but decisive shift towards strong government intervention in the floundering business world and a strong public sector. Roosevelt’s “New Deal” constructed a system of social security, public works, and income and consumption supports that drew partial inspiration from Keynesian (or “demand side”) economics, and that underwrote economic recovery and growth from the mid-1930s through the mid-1970s.³⁰ By the start of the Cold War, Americans had strong evidence that capitalism was greatly improved by governmental involvement in economic decision-making: the government had ended the Depression and had just won World War II.

To top it off, the suburbs themselves were the product of massive public investments (or subsidies, depending on your point of view). Many government programs made the building boom possible: the Federal Home Loan Bank Act (1932), which created savings and loans to fund mortgages with federal guarantees in case of default, the Home Owners’ Loan Act (1933), the Glass-Steagall Banking Act (1933), which established the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act

(1944) – known as the “GI Bill of Rights” for its pivotal support for education, job training, medical care, consumer loans, and home loans for military veterans, the Highway Authorization Acts (1947, 1956) that made the suburbs possible by building the road networks that served them, and the Federal Housing Administration, which offered direct loans (4 percent) and loan guarantees for large-scale housing developments from Levittown on Long Island to Lakewood near Long Beach, California. In reality, the middle-class suburbs resulted from arguably the largest and most complex public works program in American history.³¹

But Cold War affluence operated as an amnesia machine. Judging by increasingly conservative voting patterns, suburban dwellers forgot the public funding origins of their parents’ economic improvement; they ignored the public sources of their own communities. They accepted the message that affluence sprang entirely from private enterprise, which should therefore be unburdened by government input; economic planning and public investment were always too much like Communism to do anything but reduce the affluence of ordinary people. In *The Affluent Society*, Galbraith showed that maximizing production had come to replace economic equality and security as society’s dominant value. The best way to help production was to deregulate business and encourage consumption – and encouragement included tax breaks and direct subsidies to industry. Consumption became not only a general good but a quasi-democratic expression of individual choice. The visible sign of the superiority of free enterprise was the suburb and its shopping mall, which were in turn traced exclusively if circularly to private enterprise. The complex and largely public sources of class mobility – the public sources of the existence of the middle class as such – were obscured by Cold War culture’s unvarying definition of the American idea as an indivisible mixture of unrestricted consumption, suburbanization, racial homogeneity, and private enterprise, which together were seen as self-evident refutations of every kind of socialist or Communist system.

Widespread Counter Movements

Partially propelled by restrictive or coercive Cold War portraits of national life and identity, and partially inspired by problems that the affluent society ignored or worsened, a wide range of social and cultural movements accelerated during the Cold War period. Some, like the African-American civil rights movement, achieved a militance and national leverage greater than that of the otherwise more radical decade of the 1930s.

Social movements responded to unresolved social problems, but they also drew on a broader and deeper vision of the actually existing US that had been a staple of American literature. West Coast fiction provides a case in point. Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* (1946) was simultaneously an autobiography and a social history of Filipino Americans working as migrant laborers. Likewise, Shelley Ayame Nishimura Ota’s *Upon Their Shoulders* (1951) detailed how Japanese immigrant families in Hawaii

became Japanese Americans. Japanese American authors often addressed the war and the internment of Americans of Japanese descent. John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957) took its title from the answers its protagonist gives to the loyalty oath administered to interned Japanese Americans during the war ("Will you serve in the US military?" and "Will you swear allegiance to the US, forsaking the emperor of Japan?"). Like many war novels, such as Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, *No-No Boy* dealt with the war's reshaping and reinforcing of American masculinity, but showed the more devastating effects in the Asian American case. Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660* (1946) was a memoir/graphic novel that mixed genres and experiments with form in order to detail life in the Tanforan and Topaz relocation centers. Hisaye Yamamoto published a number of short stories during this period: "Seventeen Syllables" (1949), "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" (1950), "The Brown House" (1951), and "Yoneko's Earthquake" (1951) treat issues of internment and challenge notions of Asian American identity and whiteness. Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953) was an autobiographical account of second-generation Japanese Americans facing American racism in Seattle slums.

The US–Mexico border has always been a source of anxiety and the Cold War included an emphasis on controlling this border: Josephina Niggli's *Mexican Village* (1945) was a novelistic memoir that described the ambiguous, fluid, and even voluntary nature of national identification. Fabiola Cabeza de Vaca's *We Fed Them Cactus* (1949) and Cleofas M. Jaramillo's *Romance of a Little Village Girl* (1955) depicted the transition of the southwest from a Mexican territory into US statehood and pointed out the Mexican origins of the American southwest. Similarly, Jose Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959), the first Chicano novel published in the US, challenged the image of self-reliant American culture by illustrating a state whose economy depended on poorly-paid and badly-treated immigrant and migrant labor. In his novels *If He Hollers* (1941) and *Lonely Crusade* (1943), African-American writer Chester Himes offered descriptions of Golden State life that flatly contradicted those that would soon fuel the post-war suburban housing boom. Major literary achievement both detailed the costs of and alternatives to Cold War America, and well in advance of the somewhat greater access writers of color would have to publishing houses in the 1960s.

The modern civil rights movement is sometimes identified with the Supreme Court's decision outlawing racial segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), but in fact this decision was prepared by decades of black writing and organizing. A. Phillip Randolph, former leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, had planned a march to the Lincoln Memorial for July 1, 1941, which he called off only after he had successfully pressured President Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 8802 banning racial discrimination in defense industries. After the war, Randolph turned to desegregating the armed forces. Truman favored such a move, telling advisors that "there was a Cold War on" which encouraged this kind of progress, and calculating that he could win the 1948 presidential election only with the help of the black vote in Northern cities. The landmark events of the civil rights movement unfolded alongside the twists and turns of the Cold War: Rosa Parks refusing to move to the back of the Montgomery bus (1955), the first black students at Little Rock High School (1957), the Greensboro

lunch counter sit-ins (1960), the “freedom rides” to integrate public buses (1961), the march on Washington (1963), the passage of the Voting Rights Act (1964), all accompanied by incarceration and often fatal violence. National leaders who advocated civil rights – John and Robert Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson – were extremely mindful of the American image abroad. Their endorsement of justice for African-Americans rested on a mixture of respect for the cause, political fear of black social movements, and a desire to counter the Soviet Union’s accurate claim that American democracy was partially discredited by its foundation in systematic racial segregation and inequality.³²

While African-American leaders attacked housing discrimination and other forms of injustice written into the federal investment structure that built the suburbs, the university system, and other public services, the suburbs and its corporate consumer culture was being attacked from within. A host of 1950s books suggested that the middle-class felt trapped in its best of all possible worlds. In *White Collar* (1951), C. Wright Mills argued that “in terms of property, the white-collar people are *not* ‘in between Capital and Labor’; they are in exactly the same property-class position as the wage-workers.”³³ This in turn meant that the Cold War middle class consisted of what we might call submissive individualists, people who had to compete against everyone else for professional rewards and yet who succeeded by conforming to hierarchical business systems whose rules were already fixed.³⁴ Mills sounded the same death knell for the American intellectual, who had also become someone “solidly middle class, a man at a desk, married, with children, living in a respectable suburb, his career pivoting on the selling of ideas, his life a tight little routine, substituting middle-brow and mass culture for direct experience of his life and world, and, above all, becoming a man with a job in a society where money is supreme.”³⁵ Various widely-read analyses came to similar conclusions: America’s classless society consisted of “other-directed” non-individualists whose main aim was to please and impress others (Philip Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 1951). The typical American citizen had become an “organization man” (William Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 1956), who was perhaps capable of independent action but who rarely showed it.

Striking the same note, novelists like John Updike and John Cheever chronicled the boredom, restlessness, and despair that intermingled with alcoholism, philandering, and divorce in some of the most privileged suburbs in the country. Similar crises were explored from various angles in J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), and Saul Bellow’s *Seize the Day* (1956). Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1957) rendered as tragedy the aspiration for middle-class success. Popular novels like Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1955; major motion picture 1956), Cameron Hawley’s *Executive Suite* (1961), and non-fiction muckrakers like Vance Packard (*The Hidden Persuader*, 1957; *The Status-Seekers*, 1959), described the artificiality and the psychological costs of a manipulative system. In her groundbreaking *The Feminine Mystique* (1959), Betty Friedan claimed that the willingly submissive American housewife, doing all she could to fit her suburban model, was dying a slow, torturous emotional death, asking herself every morning, “is this all,” then asking herself every afternoon if she knew who she actually was. The cure,

Friedan said, was for the housewife to be allowed to recommit to the world outside the home and to find “creative work of her own.”³⁶

The most visible white rebels against white Cold War culture were the Beats, a loose collection of writers that included Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and William Burroughs. Ginsberg defined the term “beat” as meaning “exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up or out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, streetwise.” In a 1959 article in *Playboy* magazine, Kerouac said “It’s a kind of furtiveness . . . Like we were a generation of furtives. You know, with an inner knowledge . . . a kind of beatness . . . and a weariness with all the forms, all the conventions of the world . . . So I guess you might say we’re a ‘Beat Generation.’”³⁷ The core of the sensibility was to embrace social rejection for the sake of autonomy, to find new forms to replace the social conventions that now yielded only suffocation. Burroughs added a uniquely surrealist intensity to the mix. One could hardly ask for a more sublime rejection of organizational life than *Naked Lunch* (1959), whose world of craving, nightmares, torture, and unbidden metamorphosis unraveled the madness of real-life moments of Cold War America, like the afternoon in West Virginia when the inventor of the transorbital lobotomy, Dr. Walter Freeman, lobotomized thirty-five women in one sitting. Hipsters, beatsters, beatniks, and “white Negroes” (the misconceived but quasi-utopian concept of Norman Mailer’s) played a crucial role within Euro-America in rejecting the Cold War definition of American identity and national mission.

Dissent was powerfully disseminated by writers with a longstanding connection with the American Left. This topic is discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume, but it is worth remembering here the presence of Richard Wright’s essay “I Choose Exile,” which suggested that the US had become uninhabitable for African-Americans. Something similar could be said for Arthur Miller’s play about the Salem witchcraft trials of the 1690s, *The Crucible* (1953), which implied that the McCarthy hearings reflected an American tradition of creating social order by unleashing a deep authoritarian impulse to destroy dissent. James Baldwin’s remarkable career arose from the depths of the 1950s, with *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) rapidly followed by *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and the openly gay novel *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), which while set in Paris was an unmistakable challenge to the systematic homophobia of the McCarthy period. Lorraine Hansberry’s racial analysis in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) was informed by her long contacts with Communist Party intellectual traditions. Tillie Olsen’s *Tell me a Riddle* (1961) illuminated domestic relations from a perspective that mixed socialism and feminism. Anti-Cold War culture pervaded the period, intensifying the conflicts even as it suggested ways in which the Cold War could eventually be overcome.

A broad range of cultural and social movements dominated national life in the 1960s, which has become a decade famous for the cultural ferment and uninterrupted political protest that responded to the gamut of Cold War-period problems, ranging from racial discrimination and poverty to workplace regimentation, excessive corporate power, the arms race, and the Vietnam war. It was just as much a Cold War decade, dominated not only by the war in Vietnam but by a series of foreign interventions, each

justified as part of the global struggle against Communism. By the time the Johnson Administration escalated the American military involvement in Vietnam in 1965, a growing portion of Cold War America – including the “silent generation” of white middle-class suburbanites – felt that the country had lost its way, both regimenting and repressing its domestic population while making peace impossible in countries around the world. The “establishment” came to feel increasingly threatened not only by radicals and protestors but by criticism coming from within the middle-class mainstream. Campus protests caused so much concern in large part because they reflected dissent coming from the future members of the “professional-managerial class” (PMC) that operated the major institutions of the society.³⁸

Cold War II and the Culture Wars

The Cold War eased somewhat during the *détente* period that coincided with the Nixon Administration’s concerted efforts to stabilize American relationships with both China and the Soviet Union. The lethal international intrigue did not abate, as evidenced by Nixon administration bombings and interventions in Laos, Cambodia, Chile, and elsewhere. But the 1970s saw a partial depolarization of Cold War rhetoric and some relaxing in the realm of military affairs.

This began to change in the late 1970s during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, who approved a new confrontation with the Soviets over their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, apparently in order to weaken the Soviets’ economic and political power through their own Vietnam-style quagmire.³⁹ The election of Ronald Reagan (1981–8) brought into office a passionate and highly experienced cold warrior. His administration rapidly escalated verbal confrontations with the Soviets, questioned the value of arms control agreements, and adopted tough-looking stances even as negotiations moved forward. Many American leaders credit Reagan’s “Cold War II” with having finally crushed the Soviets by forcing them into power games that their economy simply couldn’t sustain. The ten years that followed the end of the Soviet Union appeared at first to be the unmixed vindication of every aspect of the American side of the Cold War, from its military, economic, and political to its cultural policies.⁴⁰

Another factor must also be considered. That is the reform movement that developed within the Soviet Union itself, one eventually led by Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who became the head of the Soviet government in 1985, but one which expressed dissidence arising from every part of the Soviet political spectrum, including many Party stalwarts. Gorbachev pursued the twin transformations known as *glasnost* (“openness”) and *perestroika* (“restructuring”). Though these reforms were inadequate, their sheer existence implies that American hardliners had been wrong to assert that the USSR was incapable of internal reform or, more generally, that Communism could never even partially democratize itself.⁴¹ The end of the Soviet Union is a story that in all its complexity remains to be told. The same is true of Communist China, which has entered a phase of extraordinary economic growth without the political democratization

that had been predicted as the outcome of any postcommunist move towards market economics. But these and other histories of political and economic change in the “age of globalization” are still being written – at least in the United States – under the influence of a post-Cold War culture whose main features continue rather than break with Cold War culture itself.

As one example, *Newsweek* magazine ended 1990 with a cover story on the left-wing “thought police” operating on college campuses. The item focused on a series of disparate campus incidents in which a racial or sexual minority criticized some kind of slight. Labeling these anti-discrimination efforts as “political correctness,” this widely cited piece concluded by saying, “There are in fact some who recognize the tyranny of PC, but see it only as a transitional phase, which will no longer be necessary once the virtues of tolerance are internalized. Does that sound familiar? It’s the dictatorship of the proletariat, to be followed by the withering away of the state. These should be interesting years.”⁴² Cold War rhetoric that had been used against an apparently expansionist nuclear superpower was redeployed in this cover story against twenty-year-old members of traditionally powerless American social groups whose grievances the author in fact had accepted as valid.

Similarly, the Washington columnist Charles Krauthammer claimed that the “intellectually bankrupt ‘civil-rights community’” posed “a threat that no outside agent in this post-Soviet world can match” – “the setting of one ethnic group against another, the fracturing not just of American society but of the American idea.”⁴³ The syndicated columnist George F. Will demanded that America treat the politicized humanities as a covert operation. Multicultural America was in fact a “low-visibility, high-intensity war, [in which] Lynne Cheney is secretary of domestic defense. The foreign adversaries her husband, Dick, must keep at bay are less dangerous, in the long run, than the domestic forces with which she must deal. Those forces are fighting against the conservation of the common culture that is the nation’s social cement.”⁴⁴

Many pundits invoked “PC” and multiculturalism as new versions of the Communist threat in the period of the late 1980s and early 1990s in which the actual Communist threat had faded away. The Communism of multiculturalism apparently consisted of any ethnic differences that were *not* subsumed into a common culture. Ethnic and other “identity” movements also stood for a threatening affirmation – that ordinary people could govern their highly diverse societies without a highly concentrated, militarized, and largely unaccountable central government.

Similar Cold War continuities could be seen in economics. The Clinton administration that took office in 1993 continued the Reagan-Bush rejection of the value-creating role of social systems in national life: fiscal policy adhered very closely to the advice and wishes of the financial community, eventually personified in Treasury Secretary and former co-chairman of Goldman Sachs Robert Rubin. Clinton era economic growth was strong, but powerfully skewed towards the upper brackets, and incomes in most quintiles barely kept up with inflation. The Clinton administration continued the Republican attack on a range of social programs for the poor, and ended federal welfare as such in 1996. Income supports for low-income people, nutritional

programs, health care, job retraining, higher education funding, social security, workplace safety inspections, union protections, were all cut under Clinton as part of the widespread belief that American market economics could do everything better. Labor lost its place as a partner in the creation of economic value, which was increasingly said to stem entirely from investors, executives, entrepreneurs, and technology. The concept of *public* enterprise, though it had rebuilt the county in the thirties, forties, and fifties, virtually disappeared. The word “Marxism” continued to function in mainstream circles as a self-evident insult.⁴⁵

Socialism was also held to have been discredited, and its ideal of social equality widely derided as the enemy of efficiency. Individuals who looked for change were instructed to seek it privately, in their own lives, or economically, through work, business success, and upward mobility. “Diversity” was seen as an asset if properly managed from above, but never as a source of self-governance or of an America made up of independent but mutually-respectful communities. In the early 2000s, anticommunism continued to obstruct impartial comparison of the actual records of society-based and market-based systems.

Another continuation of Cold War culture was the belief among much of the public that serious international conflicts could be resolved only with force. The attacks in New York and Virginia on September 11, 2001 that killed nearly 3,000 people might have been treated as an atrocity committed by a small, tightly-knit group of zealots who would then become the target of a carefully-coordinated global manhunt that would land then in international criminal court. Instead, President George W. Bush delivered a worldwide “war on terror” that led to the invasion of Iraq and enormous destruction and destabilization in many parts of the world. Bush initially described the US response as a crusade, on September 17, 2001, said, “there’s an old poster out West . . . I recall, that said, ‘Wanted, Dead or Alive,’”⁴⁶ called on the “enemy” to “bring it on,” and made many other similar statements that drew on the core elements of the Cold War Western.

This foreign policy model was accompanied by elements of the Cold War domestic repression, including the “Patriot Act,” passed with bipartisan support, which allowed law enforcement to investigate, arrest, and detain without trial a broad range of suspected enemies of the state, including alleged sympathizers of targeted groups who were not suspected of having themselves committed illegal acts. This legislation was a direct descendent of the Smith, McCarran, and other Cold War acts, though on some counts it is more sweeping and draconian than its predecessors. Many noted a return to accusations of treason in political discourse, with liberals again the primary targets. In one extreme case, the television political personality Ann Coulter said, “When contemplating college liberals, you really regret once again that [US-born Taliban fighter captured in Afghanistan] John Walker is not getting the death penalty.” Coulter reportedly said in an address to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC). “We need to execute people like John Walker in order to physically intimidate liberals, by making them realize that they can be killed too. Otherwise they will turn out to be outright traitors.”⁴⁷ Though this was not a typical comment, it reflected

a renewed polarization of American political life that drew on deep Cold War cultural reserves.

Ongoing Continuities

In the United States, the Cold War period's core features persist into the present. The US is still a capitalist country by definition, one where economic ground rules are set primarily by business and finance rather than government or the public. National identity remains assimilationist, with the public more likely to pass "English only" resolutions than to base policy on the country's irreducible national, racial, and linguistic diversity. The country's political discourse is not democratically structured: a small number of well-funded national figures largely control national life, and the executive branch has returned to many of the authoritarian habits that marked the Nixon White House during the Vietnam War. Public services continue to lack adequate funding and political missions. Collaborative government is still described through the impoverished category of "regulation." There are no signs that US democracy will soon evolve into a multilateral partnership among a wide range of social stakeholders. Multilateralism is also lacking in foreign policy: though the other superpower has disappeared, large polling majorities of Americans continue to support military force as a primary means of conflict resolution. The inequality boom of the past 25 years has also eroded one of the country's key strengths, which has been its large, secure, prosperous, expanding, and above all, optimistic working and middle classes. The country's historical successes have depended on this optimism in the large popular majority, but this can unfortunately no longer be taken for granted.

In its own day, the Cold War sometimes encouraged social development. On the key issues of civil rights and good wages, the epic struggle with Communism brought reformist pressure to bear on national leaders, even if only to polish America's international image. But as it persists in a very different era, Cold War culture has lost even that limited functionality. Having discredited most forms of multilateralism in economic, political, and social affairs within its own society, the US is facing complex globalized economic networks with what we could call a "cooperative disadvantage." Countries as different as Denmark and China have created capacities for socio-economic networks and partnerships that may be beyond the current cultural capabilities of the United States. American economic and policy decisions remain narrow intellectually and institutionally and, as seen once again in the 2007–? financial crisis, secretive and opaque. The US may well retain its main international advantage in the realm of culture, where its high levels of immigration, its deep histories of racio-cultural politics, and its myriad popular cultures give it extraordinary capacities for collaborative creativity. But US leaders do not seem to have grasped this advantage, or to be willing to use it as a template for updating the country's political and economic systems.

We can say that the world has exited the Cold War. We are not yet able to say the same of the United States.

NOTES

- 1 Many thanks to Gina Valentino of the English Department at UC Santa Barbara for her research assistance and for providing draft text for the section on the West Coast novel. I would also like to thank Avery Gordon for very helpful input on a draft version, and Paul Lauter for his previous work on the topics covered in this paper.
Fred Halliday, "The Ends of Cold War," *New Left Review*, March/April 1990: 5–23. Halliday states that the term "Cold War" was actually "coined by Don Juan Manuel, a fourteenth-century Spanish writer, to denote the unending rivalry of Christians and Arabs in Spain" (6).
- 2 Winston Churchill, "The Sinews of Peace," Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, March 5, 1946.
- 3 The most significant passage in the Truman speech reads as follows: "At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life. The choice is too often not a free one. One way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." (Howard Jones, "A New Kind of War": *America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* [1989].)
Truman also stated that US intervention should most often take the peaceful form of economic assistance. The Cold War canon of founding documents includes at a minimum this "Truman Doctrine" speech, Kennan's "Long Telegram" of 1946, the "Clifford-Elsey Report" of 1946, and NSC-68, discussed below.
- 4 Pascale Goetschel and Bénédicte Toucheboeuf, *La Quatrième République: La France de la Libération à 1958* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2004), p. 204.
- 5 Michael H. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945–1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See also the valuable on-line archive of papers, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945–1950: Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment," at www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/intel/index.html. The introduction to these materials makes clear that many of these initiatives were in the offing before the end of the war, but previous emphasis had been on civilian control (and better coordination) of foreign intelligence.
- 6 NSC-68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security (April 14, 1950), IV: The Underlying Conflict in the Realm of Ideas and Values between the US Purpose and the Kremlin Design, Section A: The Nature of the Conflict, available on-line at www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68-4.htm.
- 7 Nicholai Nikolov, diplomatic cable September 27, 1946, commonly known as the "Nikolov Telegram," on-line at http://isc.temple.edu/hist249/course/Documents/novikov_telegram.htm, visited August 10, 2004.
- 8 Ronald Reagan, speech to the House of Commons, June 8, 1982, London, UK, available on-line at www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1982reagan1.html. Interestingly, Reagan does not actually call the Soviet Union an 'evil empire' in this speech. But the speech is a near-perfect compendium of Cold War bifurcations: "Must freedom wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?" It also defines the West as a defender of democratic diversity.
- 9 This list comes courtesy of Armand Mattelart, *Histoire de l'utopie planétaire: De la cité prophétique à la société globale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000), p. 289.
- 10 Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Address at the Annual Convention of the National Junior

- Chamber of Commerce, Minneapolis, Minnesota,” June 10, 1953, available on-line at www.presidency.ucsb.edu/site/docs/pppus.php?admin'034&year'1953&id'98, downloaded August 12, 2004.
- 11 See National Security Council memoranda NSC-4 and NSC-4A, available on-line at www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-4.htm.
 - 12 Among many excellent studies of the Cold War arts in the US and elsewhere, see David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy in the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2003), which emphasizes non-governmental initiatives, and Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2001), which centers on the covert CIA-controlled Congress for Cultural Freedom.
 - 13 Mattelart, op. cit. n. 9., p. 285.
 - 14 For a comprehensive overview of the Western's role in Cold War culture, see Stanley Corkin, *Cowboys as Cold Warriors: The Western and US History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).
 - 15 The film count is Nora Sarye's in *Running Time: Films of the Cold War* (Horizon, 1982). A good brief overview of Cold War Hollywood is Philip J. Landon, "Films of the Cold War, 1948–1950," available on-line at www.research.umbc.edu/~landon/Local_Information_Files/Films%20of%20the%20Cold%20War.htm, last visited August 13, 2004. See also Philip French, "The Red Scare Goes Hollywood," from *Cold War: An Illustrated History* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1998), available on-line at www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/experience/culture/film.essay/, last visited August 13, 2004. See also Lary May, *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; Michael Barson, *Red Scared: The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture* (Chronicle Books, 2001); and Walter L. Hixon, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
 - 16 Text available on-line at www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/statutes/sedact.htm, visited August 15, 2004.
 - 17 A partial text of the Internal Security Act is available on-line at www.multied.com/documents/McCarran.html, visited August 19, 2004. A similar use was made of the Alien Registration Act of 1940 (its anti-sedition section was authored by Rep. Howard W. Smith of Virginia and became known as the "Smith Act"), available on-line at www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/comm/free_speech/smithactof1940.html, visited August 19, 2004.
 - 18 Identification, descriptions, and film work of the Hollywood Ten is available on-line at www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/blacklist.html, visited August 14, 2004. For a good overview, see Dan Georgakas, "Hollywood Blacklist," from Buhle, Buhle, and Georgakas, ed., *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), available on-line at www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/blacklist.html.
 - 19 The Waldorf Conference Statement text is available on-line at www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/huac_nelson1947.htm.
 - 20 Georgakas, op. cit. n. 18.
 - 21 The driving assumption behind the "Loyalty Oath Controversy" was succinctly stated in a UC Alumni Association letter at the time: on the question "of a firm policy of excluding members of the Communist Party from employment in the University, there is general agreement that, in view of world conditions of today and the realistic fact that we are in a 'cold war' with Russia, such a policy is necessary and essential when the future of our youth is involved. Furthermore, it is undeniable that a member of the Communist Party can not meet the basic responsibility of a Faculty member with respect to impartial scholarship and free pursuit of truth." S.D. Bechtel et al., "Recommendation of UC Alumni Association to Regents on Anti-Communism Policy, April 20, 1950," available on-line at sunsite.berkeley.edu/uchistory/archives_exhibits/loyaltyoath/alumni_recommendation.html, visited August 15, 2004. See also Clark Kerr, *The Gold and the Blue Vol. II*, chapters 2–3. A definitive account of this and similar controversies is Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

- 22 See Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), especially chapter 3.
- 23 A comprehensive tally of Hoover's attacks on civil rights and other leaders can be found in Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: the Man and His Secrets* (New York: Norton, 2001). On red-baiting, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the mainstream African-American civil rights organization the NAACP, see Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944–1963* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), and Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922–1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
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- 25 David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), interview with the author, available on-line at www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/404811in.html, visited August 15, 2004.
- 26 One authoritative overview of post-Cold War (and post-1973) changes in income distribution – a topic that has received enormous attention – is Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, "Long-Run Changes in the US Wage Structure: Narrowing, Widening, Polarizing," NBER Working Paper 13568 (Cambridge, MA: November 2007); see the summary Figure 1, p. 29. For an accessible overview of the economic decline of the Cold War era's middle class, see Isabel Sawhill and John E. Morton, "Economic Mobility: Is the American Dream Alive and Well?" (Washington: Pew-Economic Mobility Project, 2007).
- 27 Cited in Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic, 1988). An excerpt on the "kitchen debate" is available on-line at uwadmnweb.uwoyo.edu/AMS/WebCt_Mall/myweb/consumergoods/the%20capitalist%20model.htm, visited August 16, 2004.
- 28 For systematic treatments of the most politically influential white racial consensus of the mid-Cold War period, see Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1981), and *Turning Back: The Retreat From Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).
- 29 Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 67.
- 30 The literature on the New Deal is voluminous. For an overview of its context and achievements, see David Michael Kennedy, *Freedoms from Fear* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For the development of the public sector, see Edward D. Berkowitz, *America's Welfare State: From Roosevelt to Reagan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). For a more specialized study of New Deal economic thought, see Theodore Rosenof, *Economics in the Long Run: New Deal Theorists and Their Legacies, 1933–1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Standard works on the effects of American-style management on labor include Daniel Nelson, *Workers and Managers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); Richard Edwards, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); and David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Worker: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). For a focus on changes in labor-management relations during the period of New Deal reform, see Sanford M. Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

- 31 For an account of the financial and legal foundations of Lakewood, the Levittown of Southern California, see D.J. Waldie's haunting memoir *Holy Land* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).
- 32 See Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), and Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- 33 C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 63.
- 34 On the origins and structure of "submissive individualism," see Christopher Newfield, *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 35 Mills, op. cit. n. 33, p. 153.
- 36 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1959), pp. 21 and 344.
- 37 "The Origins of the Beat Generation," *Playboy*, June 1959.
- 38 An example can be seen in the following series of quotations, which appeared in 1961, 1962, and 1964 respectively. "A large arms industry is new in the American experience . . . In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted." (Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Farewell Address," January 17, 1961, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower* 1960, pp. 1035–40, available on-line at www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/speeches/eisenhower001.htm, accessed August 13, 2004).
- "The university's directions have not been set as much by the university's visions of its destiny as by the external environment, including the federal government, the foundations, the surrounding and sometimes engulfing industry . . . Some faculty members tend to shift their identification and loyalty from their university to the [military or

scientific] agency in Washington. Their concern with the general welfare of the university is eroded and they become tenants rather than owners . . . The research entrepreneur becomes a euphoric schizophrenic . . . [The university] becomes a kind of 'putting-out' system with the [federal] agency taking the place of the merchant-capitalist of old. Sweat shops have developed out of such a system."

"There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!"

This sequence could perhaps be read as one person's escalating radicalism. But in fact only the third passage was spoken by a radical, UC Berkeley Free Speech Movement leader Mario Savio. The first is the core paragraph of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's Farewell Address, and the second was spoken by UC President Clark Kerr, spokesperson for the rise of the "knowledge industries" and Mario Savio's adversary. In spite of their very different politics, they shared a sense that the Cold War America was weakening its own structures of government, education, and public life.

- 39 Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The CIA's Intervention in Afghanistan," interview, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 15–21, 1998; on-line at www.globalresearch.ca/articles/BRZ110A.html, visited August 18, 2004.
- 40 The canonical text for this view is Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, summer 1989; here and in the book-length expansion Fukuyama argues that American-style capitalist democracy is the highest evolution of human social order and probably the highest possible.
- 41 For one important version of this view, see the autobiography by Mikhail Gorbachev, *Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- 42 Jerry Adler, "Taking Offense," *Newsweek*, December 24, 1990, p. 54.

- 43 Charles Krauthammer, "An Insidious Rejuvenation of the Old Left," *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1990, p. B5. Conservatives frequently attack women's studies programs in tandem with ethnic studies. Culturally conservative journalists, during 1990–2, seemed more wary of the danger to national unity posed by multicultural programs, but this does not imply reconciliation with women's studies in the least. For an interesting set of responses to the PC-bashing rejection of feminism, see *The Women's Review of Books* for February 1992.
- 44 George F. Will, "Literary Politics," *Newsweek*, April 22, 1991, p. 72.
- 45 For one example, see Francis Fukuyama, "An Antidote to Empire," *New York Times Book Review*, July 25, 2004, a review of Michael Hardt and Tony Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, e.g. "The imaginary problem stems from the authors' basic understanding of economics and politics, which remains at its core unreconstructedly Marxist."
- 46 "Bush: bin Laden 'Prime Suspect,'" *CNN*, September 17, 2001, on-line at www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/17/bush.powell.terrorism/, visited August 19, 2004.
- 47 Patrick Martin, "Conference of US right-wingers hears call to execute John Walker," *World Socialist Web Site*, February 27, 2002, www.wsws.org/articles/2002/feb2002/coul-f27.shtml (accessed August 5, 2006). For a somewhat maddened commentary, see Eric Alterman, "Devil in a Blue Dress," *The Nation*, September 23, 2002, www.thenation.com/docprint.mhtml?i=20020923&s=alterman (accessed August 5, 2006). For an earlier, moderate Coulter statement on Walker, see Paula Zahn, "Sound Off: Fair Trial for Lindh," transcript of CNN broadcast January 25, 2002, transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/020125/ltn.15.html (accessed August 5, 2006).

6

Re-Historicizing Literature

T.V. Reed

“Always historicize!” exhorts contemporary literary critic Fredric Jameson. Few students of literature and culture these days would find this admonition anything more than common sense. Indeed, one might well wonder how can literature *not* be seen as existing in history? But this common sense has only been common for a short time, historically speaking. The current ways of “historicizing literature,” of understanding literature in relation to larger historical forces, have mostly emerged since the 1970s. They arose from a number of different sources and took a number of different forms. New forms of literary historicism fundamentally reshaped how texts were interpreted, raised questions about how literary value was determined in different eras, expanded the definition of what kinds of texts counted as “literature,” discovered novel ways to place literary works in relation to other kinds of written “texts,” applied literary critical methods to historical documents, popular culture, and even to works of criticism themselves, asked new questions about the “cultural work” done by literary texts, and rewrote the “canon” of works deemed important enough to be read in literature classes.

The single most important factor in resurrecting the historical analysis of literary texts was no doubt a wave of social movements in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s that reshaped the entire culture. Civil Rights, Women’s Liberation, various Ethnic Nationalist movements, and Gay/Lesbian/Queer movements, in particular, demonstrated the historical and political limits of what counted as literature. Participants in these social movements felt themselves making history, and as such were extremely alert to historical questions as they found their voices in academic debates. This general political energy became institutionalized in academia through a variety of new approaches to literary and cultural study. New literary historicisms included those shaped by the increasing centrality of the interdisciplinary field of American studies; feminist, ethnicity-centered, and “queer” critical schools; new forms of Marxist theory sensitive to cultural issues; structuralist and post-structuralist critiques of both traditional history writing and older forms of literary criticism; “new historicist” and “cultural materialist” approaches combining Marxist and post-structuralist insights; and, most recently, the

spread of British Cultural Studies as a synthesizing force uniting a number of these strands in various combinations.

The “re” in the rehistoricizing of my title refers both to a return to history after a brand of anti-historicism known as New Criticism, and recognition that this return was itself something different from earlier kinds of historical literary criticism. In the nineteenth century the historical study of literature had taken two main forms: a biographical approach focused on the lives of a set of great authors (mostly male, mostly white), and a more technical, “philological” approach that sought to understand the historical evolution of words and literary forms. Literary study was primarily the work of gentlemen (and a few ladies) with little interest in the social implications of literature. In the early twentieth century two socially conscious schools of criticism, Progressivism and Marxism, challenged these older styles. As part of a wider social reform movement in the first two decades of the century, Progressive criticism, as represented by books like Vernon Parrington’s *Main Currents in American Thought*, sought to show how literature was either a force supporting progressive, popular democratization, or a force upholding cultural, social, and political elitism. Progressives championed in particular the “realists” and “naturalists” of the late nineteenth century, who challenged corporate power, and overthrew a “genteel” literary tradition that suppressed questions of social conflict. A little later in the century, Marxist critics took up the question of historicization by deepening this critique of capitalism’s control of society and literature. Marxist criticism in the 1930s took a variety of forms but all sought to understand the creation and interpretation of literature as a social act fundamentally involved in shaping the course of history. Granville Hicks’s *The Great Tradition*, for example, offers a literary history of the United States that places literature in the context of a class struggle over the direction of American society. Though often criticized for treating literature only in its social dimension, many Marxist critics in the 1930s offered quite nuanced formal analyses of literary texts even as they argued that literature is in the world, not in some pure “aesthetic” place outside it.

The most common counter to these openly political ways of historicizing literature was (and still is) the claim that literature was somehow above politics. This vague charge was developed into a powerful argument with the rise of a group of scholars who came to be known as the “New Critics” – most notably John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks, with the criticism of T.S. Eliot much honored as an inspiration. These scholars solidified an anti-historical approach that dominated literary studies throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century. The literary “formalism” of the New Critics emerged from two quite different but mutually reinforcing forces. On the one hand, there was a desire to professionalize literary study in academia by putting it on a more objective, scientific footing reminiscent of the newly emergent social sciences. On the other side, there was a consciously political move to suppress the radical implications of Marxist styles of literary history. Several of the New Critics were associated with the “Southern agrarians,” a group of authors critical of modern capitalism via the rather different route of nostalgia for the pre-industrial South.

In order to avoid the radical implications of socially oriented criticism, the New Criticism posited a timeless pantheon of great works of Literature whose greatness lay not in their social import but in their elaborate formal organization. Lyric poetry was their favored medium, since history was less likely to intrude overtly in verse than in prose fiction. They promoted values of “balance,” “symmetry,” “organic unity,” and above all a kind of self-canceling “irony” that issued in “universal” values that avoided extremes of thought or feeling. New Critics argued on behalf of the “text” itself, declaring that all such extraneous information as the author’s biography or intentions, or any information, historical, biographical or sociological, about the context of the text were worse than irrelevant but actually damaging in their fallacious intrusion into the act of criticism. The New Critics were famous for naming and disclaiming a host of critical fallacies, including the “intentional fallacy” (who cared what the author intended?), the “psychological fallacy” (why reduce literature to mere psychology?), the “affective fallacy” (why should a poem care about how it makes an individual reader feel?), and, through it all, the “historical fallacy” (why should great literature care for the comings and goings of mere historical beings when it exists in and for eternity?).

The idea of “timeless” literature has been with us for some time, often attached to the notion of the “classics.” But the idea of “the classics” is itself an historical concept, one emerging in the Renaissance when “classical” Greece and Rome were “rehistoricized” as models for aesthetic creation. It is perhaps inevitably the case that when a given past literature is resurrected as a contemporary model, that historical act of retrieval is buried beneath the analogy of timeless connection that motivated the search. Such was surely the case during the era of the New Criticism’s dominance from the late 1930s into the 1960s. The name itself should have signaled an historical consciousness – new compared to what? But in fact the kind of formalism represented by these self-proclaimed newists was a cyclical recurrence of the desire to rescue “high Literature” from the messy tracks of history. One of the historical fallacies committed by the New Critics was their positing of an unbroken “Western tradition” of literature, a canon of “great works” descending from the Greeks through the Renaissance down to the modern world. Positing such a tradition has been shown to be fallacious in any number of ways, but one example might suffice – how does such an unbroken tradition account for the fact that many of its central “Western” figures, such as Aristotle, were rediscovered only in the middle ages and only with the help of the Islamic world, whose rich intellectual traditions had kept alive texts deemed ungodly by the Christian “West” for several hundred years?

While the New Criticism was immensely successful in institutionalizing itself as the single proper mode of doing literary analysis from the late 1930s to the mid-1960s, its dominance did not go unchallenged. Of particular importance in keeping alive an alternative, historically oriented form of literary and cultural analysis was the emerging interdisciplinary field of American studies. American studies developed during the same years as New Criticism, and emerged partly in response to it and deeply influenced by the leftist “cultural front” of the massive industrial unionization movement of the 1930s. American studies initially drew primarily from an alliance of

historians and literary scholars unhappy with the limitations of their respective fields. Among historians the concern was that an emphasis on great political events and political personalities largely ignored the importance of intellectual and cultural history, including the shaping force of literature. Among literary scholars it was primarily the ahistoricism and cultural elitism of the New Critics that was at issue.

Young critics emerging in the light of the Civil Rights, Black Power, Chicano, Native American, women's, gay, and other movements of the 1960s and 1970s began to reexamine deeply the ways in which what passed as the canon of literary texts, and the styles of literary analysis, left out both their own historical experiences, and their own ways of experiencing the social power of the written word. The cultural radicalism and interdisciplinary work of American studies scholars had prepared the ground for much of this work, but the new interdisciplines of women's and ethnic studies that drove much of the new work were also critical of the limits of American studies in its search for representative texts to speak for the whole culture.

A major part of the work done by critics influenced by this social upheaval began as recovery projects – recovering literary texts that had been lost to “history” because they had not been valued by the elite keepers of the literary tradition. Recovering books by “disappeared” black, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific-American and American-Indian writers, by women of all ethnicities, by gay writers, developed into a major force. Early anthologies, often printed by alternative presses like The Feminist Press, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, Arte Público, and many others, emerged as part of the revaluing and rediscovery process. Collections like Frank Chin et al. *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* or Toni Cade's *The Black Woman*, often combined rediscovered texts with critical essays and new creative writing. These various efforts at rediscovery were tied to reconceptualizations of the literary field that eventually coalesced into new anthologies representing texts buried or marginalized due to the ethnicity, gender or sexuality of the authors. These tasks were extended into efforts to directly challenge the dominant “canon” – the works deemed important by keepers of literary tradition. Ventures like the “reconstructing American literature” project headed by Paul Lauter and a diverse team of scholars eventually led to the first great anthology organized around new historical principles, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. This historical process in turn forced more traditional anthologies like *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* to radically revise their content.

These acts of literary recovery were never simple retrievals, but were guided by theoretical questions. As texts were resurrected and brought into the light of history, further questions immediately arose as to why they had been buried in the first place. Critics raised questions about the relative historical value placed on texts, about how histories were erased by judgments about which texts had a right to survive. It was argued that putatively formalist judgments about what constituted the “great works of literature” derived from one kind of text speaking to one part of society, and had severely limited the range of available literatures. Sometimes this argument proposed that texts of equal value even in the terms of the dominant keepers of the canon had been suppressed due to social bias, and sometimes it took the form of suggesting that

alternative aesthetic and/or cultural value systems had been pushed to the margins by this same set of biases.

This rediscovery process was also tied directly to new literary creations. The same social movements that inspired critics and cultural historians inspired a generation of creative writers to understand and represent their experiences in historical terms. Indeed, a brilliant novel like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, among the premier works to emerge from this historical process, is at once a revisionist history of American slavery, a work of cultural theory, and a stunningly effective work of fiction. Much the same could be said for works like Simon Ortiz's lyric cycle *The Sand Creek Massacre*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, or Rolando Hinojosa's series of Klail City novels. The historical challenge forged by social change movements that leads critics to (re)place literature into history is paralleled by the work of creative artists who feel the pull of history on their own writings, further blurring the lines between history and literature.

Criticism of how the "canon" – the works deemed significant enough to represent the central literary tradition for students and scholars – was formed developed in two main directions: criticizing the exclusivity of the existing canon (its favoritism toward white, male, English-speaking, middle-class writers), and developing alternative canons (representing different histories and different aesthetic traditions). A classic example of the first kind of canon busting is Nina Baym's influential essay, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood." Baym's brilliantly condensed argument was that the great white male canon of American literature was constituted largely through an unacknowledged bias for stories about how white men triumphed over or succumbed to great personal adversity (at sea, on the frontier, etc.) or to some similar "melodrama" of "beset manhood." Baym pointed out that this implicit criterion of greatness was highly gendered and rather narrow, excluding not only the female half of the species but many males as well whose life histories followed a less histrionic course, or in the case of males of color, a course in direct conflict with the stories told of white male triumph or defeat. The crucial point of Baym's argument is that individual critics need not be overtly sexist to maintain this tradition as an act of domination because its assumptions were written into literary training as basic knowledge and neutral aesthetic description. Feminist critics following Baym's lead elaborated critical biases against certain types of stories and even whole genres. Jane Tompkins, for example, demonstrated that the much-maligned "sentimental" novel was not the simplistic genre alleged by dominant critics, but one rich in complexity if viewed through an historically specific set of aesthetic assumptions rooted in the differing conventions employed by its nineteenth-century authors and readers. As Judith Newton has cogently argued, feminist critics, and I would add ethnic nationalist critics (some of whom were also feminists), anticipated and brilliantly enacted many of the key styles of analysis that would later be labeled the New Historicism.

This kind of work led directly into the second kind of canon-challenging act represented by works like Hazel Carby's rich *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* as it brilliantly traces the historical conditions out

of which black women's literature emerged, along the way revealing some of the limiting gender assumptions among her male critical predecessors and contemporaries. Houston Baker's *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature*, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, in differing but interconnected ways, sought to establish a distinct origin story and a different set of formal influences in the African-American literary tradition as compared to, but as entwined with, the "white" literary canon. Baker stressed the formative experience of slavery and the musical form the "blues" as recurring motifs in African-American experience and literature. Gates stressed a tradition of trickster storytelling ("signifying"), ultimately traceable back to African roots, that accounts for an alternative African-American aesthetic that sent creatively mixed messages to a knowing (black) and unsuspecting (white) audience about living under and resisting the shadow of racism.

Even as Baker and Gates were seeking to establish a set of critical principles for exploring the historical specificities of black literature, other writers like Eric Sundquist in *To Wake the Nation* and Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* were demonstrating the myriad ways in which the intersections of the races profoundly shaped our literary history. In a somewhat similar vein, Michael Rogin offered a brilliant historical reinterpretation of Herman Melville's works in *Subversive Genealogy*. Rogin uses Melville to argue that the so-called American Renaissance should not be conceived in narrowly literary terms, but might well be thought of as part of "an American 1848," a period of great social upheaval, driven in the US not just by class, as were the 1848 insurrections in Europe, but by those central facts of American life, slavery, expansionism and racism. In *Fifteen Jugglers, Five Believers*, T.V. Reed makes a somewhat similar case for relations among literature, cultural theory, and social movements since the 1960s. Shawn Smith's *American Archives* likewise explores the cross-racial dynamic of lynching and eugenics as it shaped US fiction and photography at the turn of the twentieth century.

This process of seeking an alternative canon of texts rooted in differing historical experiences has been extended and developed in a variety of ways by critics interested in the specific, interconnected forces of race, ethnicity, region, gender, class, and sexuality. Gloria Anzaldúa's immensely influential book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, for example, was deeply rooted in historical specificity, including the particularity of her experience as a working-class bilingual Tejana lesbian, but not all users of the "borderlands" concept have been as careful to locate themselves historically. Later, José David Saldívar in *Border Matters* and *The Dialectics of Our America*, José Limón in *Mexican Ballads, Chicano Poems*, and Ramon Saldívar in *Chicano Narrative*, trace a Chicano literary heritage rooted in the particular lives of Mexican Americans, stressing folk culture, the influence of Latin American literature, and the bicultural/bilingual experience of literally or imaginatively crossing the southern border of the United States.

Building on the work of fellow critics like Stephen Sumida, Amy Ling, King-Kok Cheung, Shirley Lim, Jinqi Ling, David Pulumbo-Liu, and many others, Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* offers a brilliant reading of the racial, class, and gender dynamic of exclusion and inclusion in the history of Asian Americans as aliens/citizens, by richly combining a reading of literary texts with legal documents, autobiography, testimonials,

and other non-fictional forms. In a like vein, Robert Warrior in *Tribal Secrets* traces the dynamic of struggles around Native assimilation and sovereignty via a history of American Indian literary intellectuals.

The historical resurrection of lesbian and gay authors and texts proceeded similarly apace throughout the 1970s and 1980s into the present. Key texts like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, had brought doubly or triply marginalized lesbians of color into greater visibility. Black feminist lesbian Audre Lorde had also provided in her work much of the basis for a queer theory rooted in racial and class oppression that has yet to be appreciated in most narratives of queer literary and cultural theory. Lesbian and gay literary recovery projects of all kinds were well under way when two books by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*, provided a model for a rich rethinking and "queering" of literary history. Sedgwick upped the ante by moving the homosexual/heterosexual binary from the margins to the center of literary and historical analysis. Kosofsky and other theorists have generated a band of followers who have contributed to a rich "queering" of all US literatures.

Efforts at revealing the limiting aesthetic biases of a selected tradition, and the establishment of a diverse array of counter-canon, also helped pave the way for examinations of texts outside of "high culture" poetry and fiction. Feminist critiques of maligned "women's genres" like the sentimental novel paved the way for work on a variety of kinds of popular texts. Michael Denning, for example, in *Mechanic Accents* richly examines the historical significance of the so-called "dime novels" of nineteenth-century America, revealing a complicated class dynamic at the heart of this popular genre of early western and detective stories. Denning drew upon labor history to argue that dime novels shaped and were shaped by working-class audiences steeped in labor culture that challenged the middle-class biases of much high art. In a contrasting spirit, David Reynolds, in his massive *Beneath the American Renaissance*, explores the myriad ways in which popular fiction and journalism – daypenny newspapers, crime pamphlets, erotic fiction, sensational novels, "Oriental" visionary tales – became transubstantiated in the great "high culture" works of writers like Whitman, Emerson, Melville, Hawthorne, Poe, and Dickinson. More recently, Shelley Streeby in *American Sensations: Class, Empire and the Production of Popular Culture* demonstrates in rich detail the contributions of popular literature to the prosecution and historicization of the Mexican-US War and other mid-nineteenth-century American imperial adventures.

Much of this new work evolved in dialogue with several schools of literary and cultural theory that had begun to appear in the US in the 1970s. The historical approaches that (re)emerged to challenge the hegemony of New Criticism differed significantly from most previous forms of historicizing in that this time around history was no longer a stable context into which literature could be inserted. Instead, history too became a kind of literary "text." Some saw this as the revenge of formalism on "real" historicism, but others saw a more complicated drama unfolding. The summary phrase that best encapsulate this process might be "the historicizing of texts, and the textualizing of history."

French critic Roland Barthes pithily caught the ironic direction of some of this work by noting that while a “little formalism drove one away from history, a lot of formalism drove one back to it.” In other words, formalism followed to its logical end will lead back to the problem of history. The New Critics never followed that path because their circular formalism led only back to confirmation of its own timeless assumptions. But Barthes’s comment is particularly helpful in understanding how by exhausting a certain set of formalist procedures, New Criticism inadvertently called up its historicizing opposite. It is important to realize, however, that a key feature of the new historical approaches that emerged was that they did not for the most part abandon formalist “close reading,” the attention to finely woven empirical details in textual analysis perfected by the New Critics. Indeed, one of the first signs of the rehistoricization of literature came from rather the opposite direction, through a process that seemed to turn historical writing into literature by applying literary critical methods to historiographic texts.

The key US figure in this process was Hayden White. White’s magisterial *Metahistory* took the literary analysis of critic Northrop Frye and applied it brilliantly to history books. White demonstrated with close formal analysis that historical writing was, after all, writing, and as such subject to some of the same laws of form found in fiction. What White called “emplotment” was the process by which the wealth of historical detail on a given subject was turned by the historian into a coherent “story.” Taking the “story” in “hi-story” seriously he argued that close analysis revealed that certain literary laws of form applied as well to historical writing. He found, for example, that historical texts could be categorized into four main types of “plot” – tragic, comic, romantic, or satiric. White showed how all historical analysis tended to gather “facts” into stories utilizing one or more of these “plots,” and he argued that the logic of this pattern was determined more by the ideology of the historian than by the nature of the historical materials. (White’s own analysis might best be considered a fifth kind of plot, the “ironic,” that does not escape its own ideological implications and evasions.) This did not mean that history was “just fiction,” but it did mean that historical truth was inevitably processed through linguistic conventions shared by fiction and non-fiction. One might have thought that historians would welcome this effort to show that they too wrote in language, and that they would come closer to historical truth if they took account of the ways in which their narratives were shaped by poetic rules similar to those found in literature. But few empiricist historians embraced this analysis. Instead its influence blended with a theoretical invasion from France that also used formalism to blow apart formalism. However, modified aspects of White’s insights were adapted by cultural historians like Dominick LaCapra to find rich new ways of using literature as part of historical analysis that in turn shaped the work of literary critics with historical interests.

While the story of the rehistoricization of literature often takes a detour to France at this point, that necessary trip can itself be a way of avoiding history. For the reception in the United States of important French critical theorists like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva, can only be understood as part

of great historical events beyond the academy. Just as in the US, in France huge social disruptions that culminated in the general strike of May 1968 deeply shaped this generation of writers themselves. Much of poststructuralism can be read as a more abstract attempt to deal with the same issues unleashed in the United States by the massive social movements that were redefining racial, gender, sexual, and class relations, and that forced a reexamination of France and the US as imperial powers in the context of the Vietnam Wars. In the light of intense social struggles, the detachment of the New Critics in America and similar formalisms in France seemed to symbolize the worst forms of patrician indifference to social inequality.

Given the time lag of linguistic and cultural translation, the major works from the 1960s and 1970s of the French critics known collectively as “poststructuralists” had their prime impact in US academic circles in the late 1970s and early 1980s. While the poststructuralists are often portrayed as formalists, in fact all of the major figures had a developed sense of the historical, or of “historicity” as they called it. As the post in poststructuralism suggests, they had a sense of their own historicity in coming after the formalism known as structuralism. But in keeping the word structuralist they also indicated that it is not possible to fully break with the past, or with the structuring force of language. In practice, poststructuralism meant a return to history, but one that continued to utilize the notion that formal structures or rhetorical conventions partly beyond the control of the author shaped all “texts” (literary, historical, cultural). Indeed, perhaps the most important single concept proffered by poststructuralists was the notion of “text.” The concept of “text” included works of literature, but went beyond it to cover virtually all modes of writing (historical, anthropological, popular, and so forth) all of which they subjected to the same kind of close reading New Critics had applied to literature. The notion of “text” refused to recognize the rigid distinction between “fiction” and “non-fiction,” literary and non-literary writing. This is sometimes misunderstood as the claim that all writing is equally made up or untrue. But in fact the boundary erasure worked by the concept of “text” moved in two directions. It not only challenged the naive “realism” attributed to historical and other non-fictional writing, but also showed that truth claims are an inevitable part of putatively fictive works. In other words, literature does real cultural work, has real implications for how we understand and act upon the world, even when it does not use the literary forms of “realism.”

In a related claim, poststructuralists argued that structural analysis could not account for its own structure, and couldn't account for historical change. That is, it couldn't explain how it managed to get outside of structures in order to see them, and it couldn't explain how these seemingly stable structures could change over time. The various poststructuralists addressed these problems in somewhat differing ways, but they all agreed at some level that their work too was embedded in limited historical preconditions they could neither fully understand nor fully escape. Derrida's famous concept of “deconstruction” neatly encapsulates this dynamic. To “deconstruct” a text is neither to destroy it (destruction) nor to purely create it (construction), but rather to acknowledge a limbo state (a de/con-struction) in which the historically contingent

act of analysis creates something new that is ironically dependent upon the earlier interpretation it seeks to destroy. The new one is not wholly the critic's own, since it is dependent upon that which it sought to displace with its own act of interpretation. It is not more or less "true" than the interpretation it has sought to replace, but only truer to the new rules of what counts as truth in the new interpretive system. In turn, those rules are determined by large historical and linguistic forces that play through and shape texts in ways their authors can only partially understand. Indeed, poststructuralists declared both the "death of the author" and the "death of the subject (individual)" in the sense that words are given meaning only in discourses that are historically determined, collective products that use us far more than we use them.

New forms of Marxist theory arose in the early 1970s as well, both as a challenge to and as a variation upon poststructural analyses. In the United States, the work of Fredric Jameson was particularly influential in bringing new sophistication and energy to the argument that an historical horizon, defined in Marxist terms as the totality of political-economic-cultural relations, unavoidably shaped the "political unconscious" of all literature and criticism. Like other rehistoricizers, Jameson did not reject formalism, but rather showed how each kind of formalism – New Critical, psychological, structuralist, and so forth – was a partially true system that ultimately had to confront a moment where its own existence and limits had to be accounted for in historical terms. Jameson speaks of three levels of analysis: immanent analysis, a socio-discourse analysis, and an epochal level in which both the text and the interpretation are placed in wider historical frames. Jameson made a brilliant case that all literary criticism is rooted in a (usually unacknowledged) theory of history. For Jameson that theory was of course Marx's, particularly as modified by neo-Marxists like Teodor Adorno, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Louis Althusser. Jameson argued that unless it confronted its historical situation, literary criticism was always ultimately complicit in the maintenance of capitalist economic and cultural inequalities.

Both Jameson's own work, and his brilliant introductions to other key Marxist literary theorists and critics inspired a whole generation of scholars to reexamine assumptions about American literature and history. Carolyn Porter, for example, challenged the long-held notion that American fiction lacked a grounded sense of history and reality, preferring instead allegorical forms of romance. In *Seeing and Being*, Porter used Georg Lukacs's notion of "reification" to show a critique of capitalism's impact on subjectivity to be at the heart of an array of American writers, from Emerson to James to Faulkner. June Howard in *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* drew upon Jameson in offering a rich new reading of the historical ground of such literary naturalists as Frank Norris and Stephen Crane.

Another strand of literary rehistoricization that emerged in the wake of the Parisian poststructuralist assault has been known mostly by the label "New Historicism." The individual most identified with this school, Stephen Greenblatt, has never liked the term, however, preferring to call the kind of work he does "cultural poetics." While this latter term never caught on the way the former did, it does point us to a clear connection between the New Historicism and work like that of Hayden White. A "cultural

poetics,” like White’s analysis of historical writing, finds literary “form” (poetic tropes) at work in non-literary texts, ranging from queenly decrees to laundry lists. Two key influences drawn upon, and sometimes uneasily synthesized, in new historicist analyses were poststructural theorist Michel Foucault and anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz contributed his concept of “thick description” to the New Historicist tool kit. Geertz was able to tease out a culture’s wider structures from one seemingly small event or “text.” In his influential essay, “The Balinese Cockfight,” for example, Geertz offered a close textual analysis of a cockfight that seemingly fleshed out all the major values and social relations of Balinese culture. Geertz’s key insight was that because cultures were made up of layer upon layer of stories, they could never be fully comprehended through a single overarching anthropological story. As further elaborated by critics of anthropology like James Clifford and George Marcus, the textualization of ethnography served once more to challenge the realisms of social science, moving them closer to the realms of the fictive. Cultural truths were always only partial, could only be gleaned through a close reading of one set of strands in an unfathomably vast web of relations and stories about relations.

Where Geertz was more interested in a kind of cultural aesthetics that downplayed political dynamics, Foucault, as read by the New Historicists, enabled critics to find social power at play in even the smallest of textual spaces. Foucault’s notion that power was diffused throughout the entire social scene, rather than concentrated in a few social actors or institutions, proved a powerful tool for these analysts. Under the inspiration of Geertz and Foucault, New Historicists tended to take a marginal event (rather than a “great” historical one), or a seemingly insignificant textual detail (a casual aside in a play, say, rather than a major speech by a character) and spin out from that small kernel vast worlds of social significance. The approach looks at culture as an integrated representational system in which literary texts circulate alongside and intertwined with other cultural texts, from economic documents to clothing to sermons to maps. New Historicists trace images and metaphors that cross the borders of these rhetorical domains. Thus literature is doing “cultural work,” is enmeshed in webs of power, but is part of a larger system that moves beyond the literary.

American studies scholar Jay Mechling quipped that “‘New Historicism’ looked a lot like the old ‘American Studies’” and that is certainly true in part. But as George Lipsitz noted in “Listening to Learn, Learning to Listen: Popular Culture, Cultural Theory, and American Studies” there were some significant differences stemming mostly from the theoretical sources cited above. Those theories offered useful new tools of analysis, but they could also lead to obfuscation. The US version of New Historicism has been criticized for emphasizing interesting details over the bigger cultural picture, for exaggerating textual power and underplaying other more material kinds of power, and for a kind of political defeatism in which the dominant system of meanings always anticipate and outflank any form of resistance. Given these tendencies, some critics have preferred to follow the example of New Historicism’s British cousin, Cultural Materialism. Placing Marx more firmly in the Geertz-Foucault mix, Cultural Materialists have often provided more specifically targeted political critiques

of representational systems. This school owes much to the work of British Marxist critic Raymond Williams, who elaborated a rich cultural sociology to locate acts of literary (and other) representation in institutional structures and formations, and thus provided a more concrete basis for analyzing the process by which textual meanings circulate through the many layers of a culture.

While New Historicism and Cultural Materialism have been most prominent in studies of Shakespeare and the English Renaissance, this body of work has flowed generally into the host of newer historicist approaches to US literatures that I have been tracing throughout this chapter. Feminist critics, African-Americanists, Queer critics, among others, have used and modified New Historicist techniques in light of their own critical projects. Likewise they have drawn from and adapted elements from Marxisms and poststructuralisms, even as they have pointed out ways in which these schools have tended to sustain certain structural biases and blindnesses with regard to issues of race, gender, and sexuality.

Postcolonial and anti-imperial literary and cultural theory is making an increasingly significant impact on the rehistoricizing of American literature. One of the peculiarities of our national history is that America managed to become an imperial power even while it was still a colony of another imperial power. Indeed, one of the ironies of the American Revolution is that it was fought in part because Britain had, through the Northwest Ordinances, restricted the imperial ambitions of American colonists. And ironies continue to abound via the role of the United States' history as a rhetorically anti-colonial imperial power. Many themes of recent criticism were presaged in essays on the Vietnam War in Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter's 1972 collection, *The Politics of Literature*. Some of the best work reflecting the impact of postcolonial theory and anti-imperial historical analysis can be found in the collection, *The Cultures of US Imperialism*, edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease. In the introduction to the anthology, Kaplan notes that the essays within hope to address twin absences in US literary and cultural history: the relative lack of cultural analysis in the history of US imperialism, and the relative lack of imperialism as a category in analyses of US literature. This terrain is further explored in John Carlos Rowe's survey of *Literary Culture and US Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*, and in Kaplan's own *The Anarchy of Empire and the Making of US Culture*.

By the early 1990s the field of Cultural Studies was providing a broad umbrella under which many forms of literary rehistoricization coalesced. Cultural Studies originated in Britain as a kind of parallel to American Studies in the US. As Michael Denning argued in "The Special American Conditions": Marxism and American Studies," the US version of cultural studies had sometimes been distracted by the more parochial question "what is American?" and had been circumscribed by the vicious anti-Marxism of the McCarthy era, while British Cultural Studies addressed the broader question "what is culture?" and was able to draw more fruitfully upon an evolving neo-Marxist tradition. By the time Cultural Studies struck it big in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s, an event sometimes compared tongue-in-cheekily to the British rock "invasion" of America spearheaded by the Beatles and Rolling

Stones, the great theoretical dramas seemed mostly to have run their course, while the less dramatic but equally important task of putting theory to work on a host of texts and topics continued apace. Cultural Studies seemed a useful, though certainly contested, term to describe a broad revisionary project for several reasons. First, the critical concept of culture was useful in displacing without eliminating the more limited concept of literature as the general object of study. Second, the Cultural Studies concept of "societies structured in dominance" offered a general rubric for talking about the increasingly complicated sense of mutual interaction among such key socio-historical forces as class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, and transnationality.

Ethno-racially based paradigms, Marxist, feminist, gay/lesbian/queer, and post-colonial paradigms, among others, while arguing for the specificity and relative importance of their particular emphases, increasingly coalesce around an historicist project of understanding literary and cultural texts as part of a modern or postmodern capitalist system of representation that structures society into dominant and subordinate groups. Indeed this body of work has grown so successful in displacing New Critical formalism that in recent years signs of renewed interest in aesthetics and purer formalisms have, as was perhaps inevitable, emerged around the edges of now dominant historicist approaches. But having inoculated themselves with heavy homeopathic doses of formalist analysis, the newer historicisms are unlikely to be easily dislodged.

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Multiculturalism and Forging New Canons

Shelley Streeby

During the last few decades, multiculturalism has been a key and contested term in US literary studies. In the 1960s and 1970s, representatives of the new social movements questioned university offerings and curricula, pressed for new departments and programs, and criticized the claims to universality that were offered by champions of dominant literary canons. As a result of these diverse efforts, in the 1980s new canons, which included more women and people of color and which often depended upon different conceptions of the literary, began to emerge. While some cultural conservatives responded loudly and angrily to these changes by recasting them as threats to Western civilization and a common culture, others sought to defuse the perceived threat of multiculturalism by assimilating it to a more traditional melting pot ideal. Later, during the 1980s and 1990s, many scholars began to criticize what they saw as the enervated version of multiculturalism that had triumphed. At the same time, many feminist and queer studies scholars, especially, voiced concerns about the prescriptive and exclusionary tendencies of the cultural nationalisms of the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, as the field of US literary study was transformed by approaches that emphasized imperialism, colonialism, immigration, diaspora, and other international frameworks, those cultural nationalisms, as well as the nationalism of the dominant culture, increasingly came under scrutiny. Even as critics worried over the problems inherent in making the nation, whether dominant or insurgent, the horizon of collective identity, they frequently overlooked the international affiliations and agendas of many of the social movements of earlier eras, as well as the coalitions among different movements that sometimes materialized.

Multicultural approaches to US literature emerged in response to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Multiculturalism in education initially derived in part from civil rights activists' efforts to push for the desegregation of schools as well as from educators' attempts to reformulate pedagogical approaches and curricula in primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. In the years that followed, however, participants in new movements questioned the tactics and goals of the civil

rights activists and pressed for more radical changes. Although the institutions and texts aligned with these movements were diverse and heterogeneous, many emphasized the linkages between power relations and culture. This emphasis often entailed the questioning of dominant hierarchies of value, including literary and cultural hierarchies, and it also supported renewed efforts to construct or consolidate collective identities, including nationalist identities, through literature and culture.

The Black Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which included groups such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panthers, was partly a response to the white supremacist violence that greeted civil rights activists, such as Martin Luther King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) allies, who defended desegregation laws. While from 1960 to 1963, the sit-in demonstrations, freedom rides, and the massive March on Washington where King delivered his famous "I have a dream" speech engendered optimism among many, the years of terror and violence that followed, including the murder of Medgar Evers, the church bombing in Birmingham that killed four young black girls, and the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King provoked doubts about whether integrationist strategies would ever succeed in changing the US racial order. From 1964 to 1968, major uprisings occurred in black communities in many of the big cities outside of the South, notably in Watts, Detroit, and Newark. In response to this unrest and also to global decolonization struggles, black radicals such as Stokely Carmichael articulated "the 'Black Power' program and concept" in hopes of effecting more "far-reaching changes in the basic power-relationships and the ingrained social patterns within the society" (Carmichael, 1968: 125).

For Carmichael, these changes required, among other things, changes in culture. Using the language of internal colonialism, he insisted that in order for the black community's "dependent colonial status" to be abolished, the "racial and cultural personality of the black community must be preserved and the community must win its freedom while preserving its cultural integrity" (Carmichael, 1968: 128). The Black Arts movement, which literary critic Larry Neal described as "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" (Neal, 1971b: 257), developed this critique and also sought to foster a distinctive black culture. The Black Arts movement was a heterogeneous cultural formation with many different local manifestations, including little magazines, manifestos, anthologies such as *Black Fire* (1968) and *The Black Aesthetic* (1971), poetry, and perhaps most famously, drama, such as the plays produced by Neal's and Imamu Amiri Baraka's (LeRoi Jones) Black Arts Repertory Theater in Harlem. Positing, in Neal's words, the "integral unity of culture, politics, and arts" (Neal, 1971a: 15), Black Arts theorists criticized what *Black World* editor Hoyt Fuller called "the restrictive assumptions of the white critics" (Fuller, 1971: 9) who opposed "universal values" with "universal implications" to the particularities of "Negro life" (Fuller, 1971: 5). Black Arts critics argued, instead, that the values of the white critics expressed the particularities of white life, and that it was therefore necessary for black artists to construct different models. The models that they created were based on a more capacious definition of literature, one that recognized the importance of oral and collective forms as well as the significance of varied performance contexts.

These models also promoted links between culture and the construction of collective identities, particularly black nationalist identities. On this point, Black Arts writers' readings of Frantz Fanon and their interest in decolonization movements in Africa, Asia, and the Americas were particularly important. Partly in response to the emphasis, within those movements, on national culture as a form of resistance to the colonizing power, influential Black Arts editors and writers mobilized narratives of black national identity in the face of what Fuller called "the terrible reality of their outsideness, of their political and economic powerlessness, and of the desperate racial need for unity" (Fuller, 1971: 9). Fuller and others hoped that black literature and culture might be a way of forging a unity that could override actual divisions and differences within the black community and provide an alternative to the dominant national US culture, one that might mobilize audiences in support of projects of social transformation. In the years to come, however, conflicts would emerge over the differences excluded from or subordinated within that imagined unity.

Within the Chicano movement, calls for unity and cultural nationalism were also responses to the decolonization movements of the era as well as to the history of US imperialism in the West and Mexico and to the particular regional, linguistic, class, and other differences within the community. Like many African-Americans, Chicanos served in disproportionate numbers in the Vietnam War; they were also active in the anti-war movement and often made connections between imperialism in Vietnam and the US history of violent expansion at the expense of Mexicans and Indians. These affiliations and histories encouraged many to imagine a Chicano "nation" as an alternative to the ideal of assimilation into the dominant culture of the US nation-state. The United Farmworkers, led by Cesar Chávez, was also an important influence on Chicano cultural nationalism and literary production, especially after 1965, when Luis Valdez organized El Teatro Campesino, a bilingual theater company that drew upon farmworkers' talents and knowledge and that was devoted to their cause. Performing sometimes on the backs of trucks among the workers and sometimes before more elite audiences, Valdez and El Teatro Campesino created *actos*, or skits, that focused on the exploitation of the workers. Like the Black Arts writers, Valdez used the language of internal colonialism to call for unity among Chicanos, whom he saw as threatened by the melting pot ideal, "a crucible that scientifically disintegrates the human spirit, melting down entire cultures into a thin white residue the average *gabacho* can harmlessly absorb" (Valdez, 1972: xxxiii). Crucial to that unity, he believed, were the efforts of artists to advocate social change, and he suggested that it was both desirable as well as "characteristic" of "Chicano writers to also be teachers, community organizers, and political leaders" (Valdez, 1972: xxx).

Although Chicanos and Chicanas did not enter universities and colleges in substantial numbers until the late 1960s, in 1968 participants in high school walkouts throughout the nation, and especially in Los Angeles, demanded a better education with more relevant curricula and more Mexican American teachers. And beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Chicanas/os in higher education pressed for Chicano Studies departments and started Chicano student organizations. In March of 1969, the

First National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference was held in Denver, Colorado, where students drew up *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, a document that argued that Chicanos “must use their nationalism as the key or common denominator for mass mobilization and organization.” Speaking to the many differences within the community, the authors claimed that nationalism “transcends all religious, political, class, and economic factions or boundaries” (Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, 1972: 404); called for “a complete revision of the educational system”; and asked artists to “produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary culture” (Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, 1972: 405). In the late 1960s and especially in the 1970s, new literary institutions helped to promote and disseminate Chicano literature. In 1967 *Quinto Sol* of Berkeley, California started to publish Chicano writings; a *Quinto Sol* prize was established and in 1970 Tomás Rivera won the first award; and in the fall of 1967, *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought*, debuted out of UC Berkeley. Although Mexican-origin people had been creating literature and culture long before the 1960s and 1970s, such new literary institutions, along with other small presses and journals that followed, created a precarious institutional base for the production of Chicano literature.

At least one of those small presses, *Arte Público*, also published other kinds of Latino literature, notably poetry by Puerto Rican writers such as Miguel Algarín and Tato Laviera. Algarín ran the Nuyorican Poets café in New York City, a place that became the center of the Nuyorican poetry movement; he also edited the influential anthology *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings* (1975). It took a long time for Chicana/o and Puerto Rican literatures to begin to appear on syllabi for US literature classes, however, and even today Puerto Rican literature, especially, is often overlooked. Then and now, these two types of Latino literature posed radical challenges to dominant US literary canons. While such canons have generally included only English-language texts, many Latino writers use Spanish as well and thereby undermine conceptions of a monolingual, English-only, US common culture. Like Black Arts movement literature, Puerto Rican literatures and Chicana/o literatures also often require a broader understanding of the literary, one that includes oral traditions, performance contexts, and musical intersections and influences. The spoken word poetry of the Nuyorican writers also demands an understanding of the oral dimensions of literature, and this is true as well of Chicana/o *corridos*, or border ballads, and the large body of Chicana/o poetry, fiction, and drama that draws on or incorporates oral literary elements. Finally, both kinds of Latino literature, as well as much of the emergent literary criticism that engages it, often foreground the history of US empire-building in the Americas and sometimes even raise questions about the naming of an “American” literature that is circumscribed by US borders.

The “Red Power” movement that emerged during these years also called attention to US empire-building and in this case, too, writers and activists often used the language of internal colonialism to forge a precarious unity and to describe their status in relation to the US nation-state. In 1969, for instance, Indian activists occupied Alcatraz, arguing that under US treaties the island was Indian land. Perhaps the most famous

organization that emerged at this time was the American Indian Movement (AIM), whose actions included the 1972 “Trail of Broken Treaties” car caravan and occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington DC and the 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973. This period was also an important era in the history of American Indian literatures, since N. Scott Momaday’s novel *House Made of Dawn* was published in 1968 and Vine Deloria, Jr.’s *Custer Died for Your Sins* was issued in 1969. In 1977, partly in response to the body of American Indian literature that emerged during this period, the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) sponsored a curriculum development summer seminar on American Indian literatures in Flagstaff, Arizona that helped to establish a field of scholars working in this area. A few years later, the critical anthology, *Studies in American Indian Literature: Critical Essays and Course Designs* (1983), which grew out of the 1977 summer seminar and which was edited by Paula Gunn Allen, offered critical and pedagogical approaches to help scholars better understand American Indian literary traditions. In her introduction, Gunn Allen identified some of the challenges facing teachers who wanted to introduce American Indian literatures into the curriculum, including learning about the cultural contexts out of which these literatures emerged, which was no small challenge since such literatures “represent several hundred different tribes and cover several thousand years” (Allen, 1983: viii); taking into account problems of translation and transcription; and understanding that “both traditional and contemporary American Indian literature rests squarely on the whole oral tradition” (Allen, 1983: xii).

During the late 1960s and 1970s, an Asian American movement also emerged, and, as in the case of the other movements, it included important literary and cultural components. The increasing numbers of Asian Americans in colleges during the late 1960s had much to do with the movement’s formation, but the Vietnam War was also an important factor, since many of those who pressed for new departments and programs, as well as an autonomous Asian American cultural identity, were also interested in the national liberation movements in Asia, protested against the war in Vietnam, and made connections between anti-Asian racism at home and racism abroad. Despite this convergence, one of the most influential early efforts to formulate an Asian American cultural nationalism – the anthology *Aiiieeeee!* (1974) edited by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Hsu Wong – made a strong distinction between Asian American identity, on the one hand, and “Asian” and “American” identities, on the other. Focusing on “Filipino-, Chinese-, and Japanese Americans,” the editors argued for an Asian-American sensibility that was distinct from both Asia and white America. While they observed that “American culture, protecting the sanctity of its whiteness, still patronizes us as foreigners and refuses to recognize Asian-American literature as ‘American’ literature,” they also debunked what they called the “myth” that “Asian-Americans have maintained cultural integrity as Asians” (Chin et al., 1974: xxiv). Praising blacks and Indians for preserving “their impulse to cultural integrity” despite the pressures of racism, they called on Asian Americans to help to forge “an organic sense of identity” in order to resist their “complete psychological and cultural subjugation” (Chin et al., 1974: xxvi).

Like other cultural nationalists, the *Aiiieeeee!* editors sometimes appealed to an “authentic” cultural identity that was defined as masculine and heterosexual. The prescriptive and exclusionary boundaries of such cultural nationalisms were contested from the very start, however, by women within the movements and in the field of women’s studies, which was also closely linked to the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the women’s movement. Toni Cade Bambara’s anthology *The Black Woman* (1970), for instance, prepared the way for the efflorescence of black feminist studies in the late 1970s and 1980s. In her preface to this collection of writing by black women, Bambara criticized models of race that depended only on the authority of male experts as well as versions of feminist literature that centered the experiences of white women. Black feminist critics would amplify these critiques in the years that followed, notably in the 1982 collection, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. In their introduction, the editors observed that women’s studies courses focused mostly on white women, whereas Black Studies was often “much too male dominated” and therefore also “ignored Black women,” and meanwhile there was a “fearful silence” on “the subject of Black lesbianism and male homosexuality” (Hull et al., 1982: xxiii). In this way, black feminists made important contributions to an emergent critique of the too narrow parameters of dominant models of women’s studies and cultural nationalism, partly by insisting on the importance of sexuality as well as race and gender.

The writers who contributed to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) also emphasized issues of sexuality as they interrogated the boundaries of cultural nationalism and white middle-class feminism. This important anthology pressed the limits of identity politics by imagining coalitions among women of color, including Latinas, American Indian, Asian American, and black women. In her foreword to the 1983 edition of the anthology, Cherríe Moraga observed that the authors were “not so much a ‘natural’ affinity group, as women who have come together out of political necessity.” The idea of such a coalitional politics forged across differences would be an important one in the years that followed. The community imagined by the *Bridge* writers also had international dimensions, since many of the writers identified themselves as “Third World” women and expressed solidarity with women of color outside the US. In the original letter soliciting contributions for *Bridge*, the editors stated that their goal was to “express to all women – especially to white middle-class women – the experiences which divide us as feminists,” and to examine the “denial of differences within the feminist movement” in hopes of creating “a definition that expands what feminist means to us” (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1983: xxiii). In addition to differences of race, the writers also insisted on the significance of class and sexuality as components of identity, and often the writers’ criticisms were directed at patriarchal and heterosexist cultural nationalisms as well as white middle-class feminism. Many of the writers suggested, also, that there were important intersections among identity categories, intersections that these movements had suppressed or failed to recognize.

A generation of literary critics who were strongly influenced by structuralist and post-structuralist theories of literature and culture were also increasingly critical of

essentialism. In an essay originally included in the MLA volume, *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction* (1979), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. criticized the Black Arts movement for its tendencies toward “ideological absolutism” as well as for postulating “‘Blackness’ as an entity, rather than as a metaphor or sign” (Gates, 2000: 161), and in literary studies such as *Figures in Black: Signs and the ‘Racial’ Self* (1987) and *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (1988), he used deconstruction and other forms of post-structuralist theory to anatomize the literary systems at work in African-American texts. Houston Baker, Jr. also drew on post-structuralist theory in his essays and in *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature* (1988), but he defended Black Arts writers by arguing for the inadequacies of a “semiotic analysis that restricted its formulations to the literary domain alone” (Baker, 2000: 207). In her essay “The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism,” Joyce A. Joyce (2000) criticized both Gates and Baker, among others, for their uses of a post-structuralism that she considered elitist and too dependent on Euro-American expression, and she, along with Barbara Christian in her essay “The Race for Theory” (2000), thereby initiated a debate about the relevance of theory for African-American literature and culture.

Although much remained to be done and although there continued to be a good deal of resistance to the idea of widening the literary canon, by the late 1980s the work of feminists and scholars of the literatures of people of color was beginning to make an impact on curricula in higher education. These scholars argued that notions of what constituted a “classic” were never value-free, and that the work of authors from marginalized groups often aspired to different aesthetic standards than those that had been enshrined by earlier generations of mostly white and male professors. They also worked hard to get more literary works by women and people of color back into print so that they could be used in the classroom. Although these efforts only slowly and unevenly affected the anthologies of US literature that were used in large survey courses, by the mid-1980s the *Norton Anthology*, for instance, began to include more work by women and black authors. The most far-reaching effort to construct an anthology that would begin to do justice to the multiple literatures of the United States, however, would not be published until 1990: the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, which included “109 women of all races, twenty-five individual Native American authors (as well as seventeen texts from tribal origins), fifty-three African Americans, thirteen Hispanics (as well as twelve texts from earlier Spanish originals and two from French), and nine Asian-Americans” (Lauter, 1991: 101), was much more inclusive than previous efforts to respond to demands for curricular change.

While debates about the canon, essentialism, and identity politics were taking place among US literary scholars, cultural conservatives were mounting an attack on multiculturalism, which, they argued, threatened Western civilization and American culture. Backed by corporate funds, in the late 1980s and early 1990s critics such as Allan Bloom, E.D. Hirsch, Jr., and Dinesh D’Souza targeted affirmative action policies and accused multiculturalists of politicizing the curriculum and undermining US schools’ mission to inculcate American and Western values. This conservative critique of multiculturalism

was itself a political project that nostalgically posited an earlier, unified national culture that never existed and that sought to idealize particular cultural traditions – in Hirsch’s case, the dominant US culture, and in Bloom’s, a “Western” culture derived from Greek philosophy – and to disallow or demonize alternatives. In *Cultural Literacy* (1987), Hirsch argued that the “acculturative responsibility” of schools was “primary and fundamental” and that multiculturalism should not “supplant or interfere” with the schools’ responsibility to make sure that students mastered “American literate culture,” which, he insisted, was not a “tribal” nor a “world” culture but a “national” culture (Hirsch, 1987). While Hirsch championed a fictive and unitary dominant national culture, in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) Allan Bloom focused on perceived threats to Western values. One of the main dangers, he suggested, was the “new curriculum,” which promoted the “acceptance of different ways” and did not teach the lesson that “Only in the Western nations, i.e. those influenced by Greek philosophy, is there some willingness to doubt the identification of the good with one’s own way” (Bloom, 1987: 35, 36). Bloom opposed this Western openness with “non-Western closedness, or ethnocentrism” as he ethnocentrically pronounced a vaguely defined dominant Western culture to be the best and only cultural tradition worth teaching.

The backlash against even the limited changes that had been achieved by diverse multiculturalist projects continued at the state level, as William Bennett and Lynne Cheney sought to institutionalize a neoconservative agenda during their respective tenures as heads of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Then, in 1990 and 1991, there was a moral panic in the media, frequently supported by inflammatory and often incorrect information supplied by sources such as D’Souza, about the supposed triumph of “PC” or politically correct values on campuses. While speaking at the University of Michigan commencement ceremony in 1991, President George Bush even joined in the PC-bashing, accusing advocates of so-called political correctness of trying to stifle free speech and setting citizens against each other on the basis of class and race. Although neoconservative efforts to define and limit the national educational agenda and to construct a multicultural bogeyman continue, it is worth noting that the early 1990s moral panic about multiculturalism coincided with the Gulf War, and that coverage of both the PC phenomenon and the War often promoted the myth of a unitary national culture and blamed dissenting voices for dividing America.

While neoconservatives warned that multiculturalism was a radical project that was dividing Americans, other critics of multiculturalism worried that it was not radical enough. Many of the contributors to Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield’s *Mapping Multiculturalism* (1996), for instance, identified problems with the ways that multiculturalism was being institutionalized in schools and in the workplace. This important book on the possibilities and limits of multiculturalism grew out of a 1992 conference called “Translating Cultures: The Future of Multiculturalism” that took place at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Although many participants hoped that strong versions of multiculturalism could be fortified and extended, most criticized weak versions that emphasized culture rather than power and that focused on changing individual attitudes rather than transforming structures and institutions.

A major concern was that weak multiculturalisms tended to isolate culture by separating it from material relations and histories of inequality. As Lisa Lowe put it, although “the concept of multiculturalism registers the pressures that demographic increases of immigrant, racial, and ethnic populations bring to all spheres, these pressures are registered only partially and inadequately in aesthetic representations; the production of multiculturalism instead diffuses the demands of material differentiation through the homogenization, aestheticization, and incorporation of signifiers of ethnic differences” (Lowe, 1996: 415). In other words, weak multiculturalisms sometimes confused representation and visibility in the aesthetic and cultural spheres with representation and power in the political and material spheres. At the same time, as Lowe observed, they often erased or homogenized differences and contradictions within and among groups, and such an erasure supported the idealization of abstract principles of difference and cultural diversity, which in turn threatened to displace issues of power, class, and race and foreclose a questioning of institutional and structural barriers to equality.

Many of these critiques suggested that the pluralism defended by certain weak multiculturalisms remained, in Gordon and Newfield’s words, a demand for “assimilation in disguise” (Gordon and Newfield, 1996: 1). On the one hand, multiculturalisms that idealized an equality among multiple cultures often ignored histories of material and political inequality as well as the “centrality and domination of whiteness” (Gordon and Newfield, 1996: 87) within traditional canons. Thus multiculturalisms that simply added new texts and objects to these canons without questioning the logic of their construction risked naturalizing white-defined aesthetic and cultural norms. On the other hand, multiculturalisms that explicitly defended the idea of a common cultural core that persisted in spite of differences also tended to naturalize white norms, since this core was generally identified with white-defined ideals and values. Even worse, Gordon and Newfield claimed, the insistence on a “core to multicentric negotiations stigmatizes those who want to change the core as attacking the structure of civil society” (Gordon and Newfield, 1996: 93). Such versions of multicultural pluralism sometimes sought to discredit more radical versions of multiculturalism by understanding them as nationalist and therefore separatist. As Gordon and Newfield suggested, however, the “problem with nationalism for white people has generally been the reverse of separatism: Chicano, Indian, and Black militancy has threatened not to separate and go away but rather to stay and change society’s basic ground rules” (Gordon and Newfield, 1996: 93). Like Gordon and Newfield, many of the contributors to *Mapping Multiculturalism* similarly insisted that while weak multiculturalisms suppressed conflict and appealed to a higher, and too often white-defined, unity, a strong multicultural pluralism that was irreducible to white norm assimilationism had to be based on power-sharing as well as fundamental transformations in structures and institutions.

Another problem that concerned these critics was the corporate refunctioning of multiculturalism as a tool to manage a racially heterogeneous US labor force that included large numbers of women and immigrants. In other words, while neoconservatives such as Hirsch and Bloom viewed multiculturalism with horror, corporations

were busy adapting the rhetoric of multiculturalism for their own purposes. Generally this corporate refunctioning involved efforts to control diversity and difference in ways that facilitated the containment and suppression of conflicts. During the 1980s and 1990s, as capitalism became increasingly transnational and as corporations relied, more and more, on Third World as well as US workers, the problem of diversity management became even more urgent for capitalists. Although corporate agendas and changing demographics in schools and in the workplace provoked some educational institutions to try to incorporate multiculturalisms in ways that neutralized the latter's most radical aspirations, many critics suggested, however, that attempts to accommodate multiculturalism also opened up institutional spaces that could be fought for and claimed by more critical projects. At the same time, many insisted that such a corporate and institutional emphasis on diversity management made the analysis of issues of class, race, and power even more pressing for critical multiculturalisms.

During the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, colonial and post-colonial theories also had a significant impact on the study of multiculturalism and US literatures. Many of the leading texts and ideas derived from the decolonization movements of the 1950s and 1960s, but the work of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha was also influential. And Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's anthology *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993) helped to make issues of empire central to the field of US literary and cultural studies during the 1990s. As Pease suggested, this volume was partly a response to macropolitical events of the period, notably the Gulf War, the Columbus quincentennial, and the end of the cold war: "While the breakdown of cold war ideology made formerly submerged heterogeneous cultural histories available to public and scholarly discourse, clashes over the celebration of the Discovery made visible an imperial history that the Gulf War, in its renewal of an imperial synthesis, threatened once again to eclipse" (Pease, 1993: 22). In her introduction, Kaplan argued that "imperialism has been simultaneously formative and disavowed in the foundational discourse of American studies," and the contributors to the volume foregrounded issues of empire in early science fiction, in Tagalog nationalist plays performed during the US war and occupation of the Philippines, in the border writings of Américo Paredes, in Gulf War spectacles, and in the journalism and novels of African-American author Pauline Hopkins, to name just a few examples. At the turn of the twentieth century, two new collective projects – *Post-Nationalist American Studies* and *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* – also emphasized the importance of empire for the field of US literature and culture and sought to place the latter within a global frame.

As these examples suggest, global and transnational perspectives often informed the study of the US literatures of people of color in the 1990s. The work of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Hortense Spillers, and others encouraged scholars of African-American literature and culture to investigate diasporic histories and to analyze transnational formations such as the black Atlantic. The US-Mexican War sesquicentennial and the centennial of 1898 also inspired critical work on US imperialism by scholars of Chicana/o, Cuban, Filipino, Dominican, and Puerto Rican literatures and cultures, while changing

demographics and conflicts over immigration and a resurgent US nativism sparked analyses of the US-Mexican borderlands and the complexities of heterogeneous Latino identities. In the field of Asian American studies, too, the long history of US imperialism in Asia, together with changing demographics, provoked work on diaspora and on immigrant groups from South Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, India, and Pakistan, whose numbers increased after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolished quotas favoring northern European nations. And scholars of American Indian literature frequently extended their analyses beyond the frame of the US nation-state in order to compare imperialisms and focus on indigenous peoples in Canada, Mexico, and the other Americas.

This 1990s work on imperial and global contexts for US literature and culture was not, however, a new development. This is an especially important point in the case of US ethnic studies, for the latter has all too often been misrepresented as a field defined by provincial identity politics. Although the nationalist movements of the 1960s and 1970s sometimes constructed identities in exclusionary ways, international concerns and affiliations were central to these movements from the beginning, and they were also important components of the women of color feminisms that revised and complicated the premisses of cultural nationalism and the middle-class white women's movement. Coalitions among different movements also frequently emerged, such as those that came together to protest the war in Vietnam and later, the attacks on multiculturalism and political correctness. For these reasons and more, it should be remembered that the current emphasis on global frameworks, imperial histories, and coalitional politics is something that radical social movements have taught to scholars of US literature and culture rather than the other way around.

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Part B

Writers and Issues

Indigenous Oral Traditions of North America, Then and Now

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As N. Scott Momaday, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Kiowa novelist, has written, “American literature begins with the first human perception of the American landscape expressed and preserved in language.” Building on Momaday’s words, Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver adds, “That beginning – that first preservation in language – occurs in the orature of Native peoples” (Weaver, 1997: 47). Indigenous oral traditions have often been treated as textual artifacts, representations of a culture past, an Other to the corrupt written word. However, this extensive body of literature has played, and continues to play, a vital role in the adaptation and survival of Native nations on Turtle Island, or North America, even as the stories change to incorporate new insights and ideas. An interdependent and intertextual relationship has developed between oral traditions and the written word, which fosters a wide range of expressive arts and applications in contemporary indigenous communities. Rather than simple “legends” communicating rudimentary morals, or “myths” that posit the formation of the world, the complexity of “that which is written on the people’s tongues” demands the “language work” of interpretation, and in particular, comprehension of the critical role of oral literatures in the “landscapes” and communities from which they emerge and in which they operate (Kalifornsky, 1991: xvi, 7).

Oral Traditions in Place

There is an old story: a missionary is gathered with a group of Native leaders, telling them of the origin of human beings. He tells of the Garden of Eden, the creation of the earth in seven days, the formation and fall of Adam and Eve. They are rapt, listening. He’s pretty sure he’s got them in the palm of his hand. However, when he finishes his tale, one of the leaders promptly relates his own nation’s account of the origin of corn, a familiar story in which the small crowd is equally engaged. The missionary is livid, perplexed, unable to contain his frustration. In a version of this story published by

Charles Eastman, he cries, "What I delivered to you were sacred truths, but this that you tell me is mere fable and falsehood!" To which the teller responds, "My Brother . . . it seems that you have not been well grounded in the rules of civility. You saw that we, who practice these rules, believed your stories; why, then, do you refuse to credit ours?" (Eastman, quoted in Deloria, 1992: 85).

As the Dakota scholar Vine Deloria has argued in his landmark *God Is Red*, the conflicting perspectives related in this story have much to do with differences in the role of place and time in religion, as well as language and literature. There are hundreds of indigenous nations on this continent, and hundreds of creation stories. Many of the narratives share the same themes; some are shared in multiple regions, while others are unique to one particular place. For instance, in the northeast, we Wabanaki people have a creation story that firmly roots us, like the ash tree, in this land, while those nations connected to the Delaware, like the Mohicans, Pequots, and Mohegans, share a creation story that identifies them with the movement of tidal waters, enabling them to move their villages to other locations when threatened by outside forces or internal division, whereas the Haudenosaunee people tell the story of Sky Woman and the emergence of this earth on turtle's back, which connects them to the many other nations on Turtle Island who share a version of this creation story. All are considered equally valid, and have been relayed between nations in both formal and informal contexts for millennia. One of the basic understandings behind Eastman's tale is the belief that human beings can listen to and accept many other peoples' stories of creation, without the truth of their own story being threatened. In fact, the missionary is castigated, not for relaying a falsehood, but for his impolite behavior in rejecting another nation's story. However, this understanding is not the result of a sort of universal cultural relativism among the indigenous nations of the continent, but rather, is based in the knowledge that each story belongs to its particular place. As Deloria has observed, while "Christianity has traditionally appeared to place its major emphasis on creation as a specific event . . . the Indian tribal religions could be said to consider creation as an ecosystem present in a definable place," with an emphasis on "what happened here," as opposed to "what happened then" (1992: 77). Stories are the map of the land, the map of how to be human in a particular place, the key to survival in a specific environment.

Oral traditional narratives often contain critical acquired knowledge about how to subsist in an ecosystem, mapping the relationships between plant, animal, and human beings within indigenous homelands. As Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko has written of the Pueblo emergence stories, "The Emergence was an emergence into a precise cultural identity," an "interior journey" of "awareness and imagination" which delineated the people's difference from and complex relationship to "all other life" with which they shared space (1996: 36–7). As in the Haudenosaunee story of Sky Woman, in which the earth is born through the interdependent, cooperative activity of plants and animals, the Pueblo people emerged into this world, "the Fifth World," only with the assistance of other-than-human beings. This cultural transformation entailed a realization of interdependence, and the formation of particular kinship

relationships with the plants and animals around them, in this case, through the clan system (1996: 38). These stories are relayed annually at Laguna, in a ceremonial context, as the community's continuance is dependent on the renewal of these relationships, not only with each other, but also with the many beings in their high desert homeland. Indeed, the diversity of creation stories relates directly to the diversity of life forms in any given environment. As Deloria has written, "To recognize or admit differences, even among the species of life, does not require then that human beings create forces to . . . gain a sense of unity or homogeneity. To exist in a creation means that living is more than tolerance for other life forms – it is recognition that in differences there is the strength of creation and that this strength is a deliberate desire of the creator" (1992: 88).

Of equal importance is the recitation of stories *at* particular places. As Silko relates, "Location, or place, nearly always plays a central role in the Pueblo oral narratives. Indeed, stories are most frequently recalled as people are passing by a specific geographical feature or the exact location where a story took place. The precise date of the incident often is less important than the place or location of the happening" (1996: 33). Here in the northeast, rock and stick cairns marked the locations of crossroads, and were tied to particular stories. When passing by a cairn, the traveler is obliged to add a rock or stick, and to tell or listen to the story that is attached to that place, often relating important information about where to turn next, both literally and metaphorically. The reluctant anthropologist Keith Basso, working and learning among the Apaches at Cibecue (Fort Apache Reservation, Arizona), relates that for them, "the past is a well-worn 'path' or 'trail' (*intin*) which was traveled first by the people's founding ancestors and which subsequent generations of Apaches have traveled every since" (1996: 31). The past can only be known through interaction with these places, awareness of their place-names and the stories associated with them, and deliberation on the stories and the relationships they demarcate. In concert with Deloria and Silko, Basso observes that, "what matters most to Apaches is *where* events occurred, not when, and what they serve to reveal about the development and character of Apache social life" (1996: 31).

While, as Basso acknowledges, ethnographers and literary scholars have written volumes deliberating the impacts of removing oral stories from their performative contexts and transferring them to the written page, the removal of stories from their places, and from their social and ecological environments, may be a much greater concern. As Silko relates, the Pueblo emergence story is a frequently traveled route, which fosters an "interior journey" (1996: 35–7). If, she writes, the story and its places are part of an old "ritual that retraces the Creation and Emergence of the Laguna people as a culture, as the people they became, then continued use of that route creates a unique relationship between the ritual-mythic world and the actual, everyday world. A journey from Paguat to Laguna down the long decline of Paguat Hill retraces the original journey from the Emergence Place, which is located slightly north of the Paguat village" (1996: 36). Stories themselves operate as living beings within a network of relationships, rooted in particular places.

Ancient Networks and Literary Traditions: the Origin of Corn

Importantly, although certain elements always remain, oral traditions adapt and change as new beings, tools, and ideas enter into the landscape, and new lessons are accreted. Long before European colonization was even imagined, networks of exchange crisscrossed the Americas, connecting towns from the northeast coast of the continent to the southwest of greater Mexico and beyond. Indigenous intellectual and literary traditions were carried, and carried out along these trade routes, and within the towns that emerged in fertile river valleys all along these old roads. As Gordon Brotherston has observed, these networks entailed not only “reciprocal traffic” in goods, but in narrative exchange and influence (1992: 22). To give just one example of the rich intellectual and cultural exchange which is evident in indigenous oral traditions, we can spend some time considering the narrative mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the origin of corn, the story of the corn mother, which traveled with the revolutionary corn seed as it made its way throughout the continent.

In a version told by the Cherokee author Awiakta, adapted from one published by Jack and Anna Kilpatrick, corn emerges from the body of a woman. Two young men, curious about the origins of the fine food their grandmother makes, spy on her as she draws the ground meal from her body. Because of their intrusion on her “private work,” she grows ill, and tells them that she will die. However, she also gives them explicit instructions to bury her in the ground and tend her body carefully, without disturbance. Only if they follow her directives attentively, she insists, will she return to feed them. “I will be the Corn-Mother,” she says, and from her body arises the corn plant, which still today, continues to feed the people – not only the Cherokees, but the entire world. As Awiakta tells it, the story contains crucial lessons on the right relationships between people and plants, between young people and elders, between men and women, which enable us to thrive. And as she writes, the separation of the story from the seed could result in dire consequences; the traveling of the plant, without its requisite law of respect, vigilance, and thankfulness, could result in a replication of the corn mother’s departure (1993: 10–15).

The corn mother story is prolific on Turtle Island. Since corn itself emerged in the hot tropical climate of Mexico, it is likely this story began there as well, making its way up the networks of trails to what is now considered the southwest of the United States, and across the Gulf of Mexico up the Mississippi River, spreading west to the Plains, north to the Great Lakes, and east into the Tennessee River valley and the southeast, even all the way to the “dawnland,” or *Wabanaki*, the northeast coast. At each location, the story, like the plant to which it is tied, is adapted to particular environments and their requirements. Here in the northeast, where the land is saturated with marshes, lakes, and ponds, water is a key element. In the *Wabanaki* version, told by Penobscot author Joseph Nicolai, the first mother conceives of a food to nourish her starving children in the water, a green blade trailing behind her. In the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois) version, a world of water is transformed by the grandmother Sky

Woman and the water animals into the earth on turtle's back, and corn subsequently emerges from the body of Sky Woman's daughter after she is killed by the rash impulse of one of her twin sons. This story is a fine example of the incorporation of new elements – agriculture and its accompanying narrative – into an older story, from a time in which the northeast was immersed in water and the people were almost exclusively dependent on hunting and fishing for survival.

In the Americas, agriculturalists, most often women, encouraged the diversification of plants, striving for ever increasing variation as the best possible strategy for survival in a changing, often unpredictable, world. A prime example is the development of Eastern flint corn, generated from the original plant that flourished in the dry heat of Mexico, but adapted to the wet, cold climate of northern woodlands. The stories themselves are diversified as well, containing agricultural knowledge specific to local environments. For instance, as Gordon Brotherston has observed, the original Nahuatl narrative actually maps the “types and phases of American experiments in plant genetics, vegetal grafting, and seed fertilization” (1992: 276). Significantly, both the corn plants and the corn stories are cultivated in annual cycles, renewed, honored, and retold in public ceremonies. Each telling begins with a seed, which will grow into a recognizable plant, but for it to nourish the people, it need not be identical to the plant that grows beside it, or to the plant that grew in its place the year before. It is not only the plant that needs to be cultivated, but also the relationship between the people and the plant, as well as the story that transmits acquired knowledge of how to maintain and develop that relationship in place.

As corn and its story traveled these indigenous networks, they were accompanied by a form of indigenous literature, a graphic system that was intricately intertwined with the oral traditions of the Americas. These “verbal and visual languages” are most often associated with Mesoamerica, but it is also important to consider the spread of iconography and its related oral narratives up into the networks of the Mississippi and beyond (Brotherston, 1992: 6). Although much study of indigenous oral traditions has been marred by the current geo-political border that divides the United States from Mexico, as well as the linguistic divide that this border sustains, it is critical we understand that for millennia on this continent, such a border did not exist, and exchange thrived on the north–south routes that ran along the great riverways, and into the gulf seas. It is equally important to understand that the writing systems which may have first developed in Mesoamerica are quite different from the alphabetic writing with which many of us are most familiar. At least fifteen distinct writing systems were in use before the Spanish invasion, including the logographic/syllabic systems of Mayan people and the codified pictorial systems of Mixtec and Nahuatl peoples. They combined word and image to transmit knowledge and narratives through “iconic script,” and these word-images were tied to oral traditions, as well as place names (Brotherston, 1992: 50). Leslie Marmon Silko has remarked on the “rich visual language” of the Mesoamerican “screenfolds” or “painted books,” observing that “the Mixtec and Maya,” “combined painting and writing, two activities that Europeans consider distinct.” As she notes, in the Nahuatl language, the word for the artisans who

created the codices, *tlacuilo*, meant both “painter and scribe” (1996: 156–7, Brotherston, 1992: 50). However, trying to “read” their iconic script, without knowledge of the oral traditions and toponyms with which they are associated, would likely be an exercise in futility. In this way, literature, art, and “orature” in the Americas have always been intertwined.

One of the most well known of these narratives is the Quiché Maya *Popol Vuh*, which includes the story of the origin of corn, and its association with potent maternal figures. Like the Haudenosaunee story of Sky Woman and her daughter, this narrative involves the intertwined activity of a grandmother, Xmucane, and a mother, her daughter-in-law “Blood Woman,” both associated with the creation of corn. When Blood Woman arrives at Xmucane’s home, pregnant with twins, she proves her ability to provide by drawing a full harvest from a single ear of corn. Subsequently, Xmucane tends two corn plants, planted in the center of her home by her twin grandsons, as they engage in a parallel journey in the world below. As the corn emerges, struggles, and begins to thrive, so do they. Later in the narrative, human beings emerge from two kinds of corn – yellow and white, which must be “fetched” by the animals from the mountain Paxil at “Broken Place, Bitter Water Place” in present-day Chiapas (Brotherston, 1992: 237–9; León-Portilla and Shorris, 2001: 438–9). After Xmucane grinds the corn into meal, with the assistance of the Quetzal snake and the animals, “they put it into words: the making, the modeling or our first mother-father” (Portilla and Shorris, 2001: 439). With the combination of corn and words, the Quiché emerge as the “maize people,” the culture of this new era. Blood Woman “heralds new possibilities,” and through Xmucane’s fashioning of humans from corn, together with the Quetzal snake, and the cooperation of plant and animal life, they usher in the fifth world. As Brotherston has written, this complex narrative, proposed “a new way of life defended today by the Quiché . . . the *Popol vuh* serves as a charter for that nation and human society more generally” (1992: 237).

One of the many parallels between the *Popol Vuh* and Nahuatl narratives of the origin of corn involves the cooperation between Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, and the founding grandparents Oxomoco and Cipactonal, who correspond to Xmucane and her counterpart, Xpiacoc. In many Mesoamerican narratives, Quetzalcoatl is the one who brings “writing, to his people and to Mesoamerica as a whole” at the town of Tula or Tollan, “the place of rushes” (Brotherston, 1992: 156, 275, 218). The *Popol Vuh* locates Tula as the place which fosters the “first production of maize” and where people first “exchanged the life of the family (*chinamit*) for that of the town (*tinamit*)” (Brotherston, 1992: 166). Quetzalcoatl is instrumental in the effort to bring about the emergence of “four-colored maize,” along with Red Ant, who carries kernels “from the heart of the food mountain,” *Tonacatepetl*, while the “divination” of Oxomoco, Cipactonal, and “the four-colored rain gods,” releases the multicolored corn from the mountain to feed the newly formed humans. Humans themselves are made from a meal of “bones,” which also represents plant material, ground by “the Snake Woman Cihuacoatl,” also known as “the Mother Goddess” (Brotherston, 1992: 274–5, Portilla and Shorris, 2001: 208). The following lines translated from the Nahuatl *Cantares mexicanos*,

a collection of “poem-songs recited” at Tula, represent a continual emphasis on this relationship between human and plant, transformation and birth in Mesoamerican oral and graphic literature (Brotherston, 1992: 158, 160):

As white and yellow maize I am born,
The many-colored flower of living flesh rises up
and opens its glistening seeds before the face of our mother.

These narratives and songs traveled with corn, absorbing the transformation of culture in the many places through which they moved. Nahuatl graphic texts map relationships far into native homelands in the places now known as Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado, demonstrating economic and cultural relationships between Mesoamerican cities and the ancestors of the contemporary Hopi, Diné (Navajo), Pueblo, Zuni, Apache, Yaqui, Akimel O’odham, Tohono O’odham, Ute, and Shoshone nations, as well as multiple communities all the way to the Pacific coast (Brotherston, 1992: 21, 245–9). Oral traditions among the Zuni, Pueblo, Hopi, and Diné, among others, contain familiar elements, including the narrative of the twins and their mother, and the emergence of maize from cooperative activity and women’s labor, which coincides with the emergence of human beings into a new era, a “fifth world” (or a “fourth” for some, including the Diné). As Brotherston notes, they have in common the concept of multiple, layered “ages that end in cataclysm and continue to inhere in and shape the present” (1992: 239, 240), “world ages,” in Vine Deloria’s terminology, during which the world as we know it is destroyed, then renewed (Deloria, 1992: 101). Although sharing many tropes, themes, and characters, all of these narratives are place-specific, located firmly in their own topography, mapping knowledge that is critical to the growth of agriculture and the survival of human beings in a precise environment. As with the Quiché and Nahuatl narratives, emergence is tied to specific mountains, and as Leslie Silko notes, these stories – in the case of Laguna, the story of the Twin Hero brothers and Kochininako (“Yellow Woman,” the corn mother) – are attached to and recounted at distinct geographic features in the land (1996: 33–4). Among the Apache, as Charles Henry of Cibecue explains, “groups of people named themselves for the places where their women first planted corn,” and clan lines, which come through the mothers, are firmly rooted in these places (Basso, 1996: 21). In this way, familiarity with topography is intimately tied to knowledge and comprehension of oral traditions, and the destruction of such places can also threaten the continuance of the people, who rely on the information contained within the stories not only to understand their own histories, but to enable their physical and psychological survival. As Diné poet Luci Tapahonso writes in “This Is How They Were Placed Here for Us” (Iverson, 2002: 7):

Hayoolkaalgo Sisnajini nihi neel’iih leh.
Blanca Peak is adorned with white shell.
Blanca Peak is adorned with morning light . . .
She is the brightness of spring.

She is Changing Woman returned . . .
 Because of her we think and create
 Because of her we make songs.
 Because of her, the designs appear as we weave.
 Because of her, we tell stories and laugh.

These oral traditions are “mapped” not only through stories recounted at particular places, but also through graphic representation. This contemporary poem, in its imagistic evocation of a particular mountain of emergence in relation to critical elements of the creation story, as well as the continuing activity of creation within the Diné community, belongs to this literary tradition. Some text-maps are permanent, such as petroglyphs carved into stone, while others are temporary, such as sand paintings, which may be drawn in relation to oral traditions, with a specific purpose, perhaps even helping to enact change. These graphic texts may also demonstrate social and geographic networks, mapping the relationships between cities, nations, cultures, and regions. They may map the relations between contemporary nations, geographic neighbors, or between the people or cultures of different eras who exist in layers in this place. These texts, in combination with the oral traditions and toponyms to which they are tied, may function as pragmatic tools for travelers, and/or highly figurative literature, in which is embedded “an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies for survival” (Silko, 1996: 31).

Narrative maps show the routes by which corn and its stories traveled far up the Mississippi River and into its tributaries and networks of trails. “Map Rock,” an intricate, detailed petroglyph on the Snake River in present-day Idaho, maps the relationships and trade routes between the large fishing and trade towns on the northwest coast, and the people of the Great Basin, who brought animal hides, and most likely, corn (Warhus, 1997: 19–21). Quapaw map-texts on buffalo hide from the Plains show their own villages on the lower Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers in relation to upriver Cahokia, the largest classical city north of Mexico, mapping a cultural and geographic history that is intricately intertwined with their oral traditions (Brotherston, 1992: 181–2). Along with corn stories, corn mother iconography is found on ceramics at this central agricultural town and trade hub at the confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers, including sculptures of “the woman who provides and shows how to multiply maize” and “a gourd whose vine is also the tail of a snake that is also the earth tilled by a woman” (Brotherston, 1992: 177, 53). Many of the peoples from the north have oral traditions of both corn and graphic writing coming from the south, and from Cahokia, it was carried west, north, and east. On the Plains, among the Lakota, the emergence of corn was recorded on buffalo hide winter counts, with accounts passed on over hundreds of years. A winter count held by a Lakota man named Battiste Good began with a graphic image of “White Buffalo Calf Woman,” a Plains version of the corn mother, who gave the people a bundle that contained “four grains of maize, one white, one black, one yellow, and one variegated,” echoing the Nahuatl story, but adapted to the hunting culture of the Plains. According to this account, “She said, ‘I am a buffalo, The White-Buffalo-Cow. I will spill my milk all over the earth, that the people may live.’

She meant by her milk maize, which is seen in the picture dropping from her udders” (<http://wintercounts.si.edu/>). In the creation story of the neighboring Arikara, according to historian Colin Calloway, “Mother Corn led her people into the Missouri Valley and turned herself into corn so the people would have seed to plant” (2003: 112). Anishinaabe scrolls, written on birchbark, portray their own movement west into the Great Lakes and Plains from Wabanaki, but also document the migration of culture from the south, including the arrival of corn (Brotherston, 1992: 190). Writing on birchbark *awikbiganak* and fashioning wampum belts of quahog shell, northeastern peoples adapted local materials to create graphic maps and mnemonic devices for the recounting of communal histories. Later nineteenth-century writings in English, based on these oral forms, relay the arrival of agriculture, the emergence of the corn mother, and the complex and changing web of relations between nations, including Tuscarora (Haudenosaunee) author David Cusick’s *History of the Six Nations* (1826) and Penobscot (Wabanaki) author Joseph Nicolar’s *Life and Traditions of the Red Man* (1893), while Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) author William Warren’s *History of the Ojibway People* is directly rooted in the Anishinaabe scrolls. During the same era, the corn mother narratives made another migration, carried by those who were forced from their homelands in the southeast under the US Removal Policy. The names of towns, landmarks, and their associated stories were transplanted to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) and continue to map space in Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw communities today. The corn mother story and the annual Green Corn ceremonies associated with the first harvest are ongoing.

In contemporary Native literature, these oral traditions continue to transform, while they simultaneously document and foster networks of exchange. Awiakta’s *Selu*, which opened this section, argues poetically for the application of the Cherokee Corn Mother story to current issues, both within and beyond indigenous communities, while Leslie Marmon Silko’s fictional adaptation, “Yellow Woman,” makes clear that the corn mother story lives on through the bodies and minds of indigenous women, who may see the stories operating in the seemingly ordinary events of their lives. The stories, she suggests, open many possible routes of interpretation and action, through deliberative thought and imagination in relation to the actual places, people, and non-human beings with whom we continue to interact today.

Pragmatism and Imagination: Indigenous Oral Traditions and the Power of Words

As the corn mother narrative demonstrates, oral traditions are often intimately tied to subsistence. The story includes crucial information about how to treat the plant at all the stages of its life cycle for the most successful growth, necessarily adapted to the particular environment of the people who are telling it. The accumulated knowledge that these oral traditions contain remains vital to contemporary communities. As Anishinaabe author Lois Beardslee has observed, “More pragmatic than mystic, our characters and stories about them remained culturally intact because they are still

applicable. They teach our children a system of behavioral guidelines and cultural values. They teach them how to stay out of trouble or avoid being hurt. They explain things as rudimentary as, 'No, the first time,' or avoiding gluttony. The stories also preserve nuts-and-bolts information about how to do things the right way, such as peeling a tree and building a temporary bark shelter" (2003: vii). Likewise, Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver notes, "Every story – every myth – has 'a pragmatic character.' Every myth serves some purpose or end. The logical question, then, is to ask where a particular myth came from and what and whose purposes and ends it is designed to serve" (1997: 15). Stories about hunting, for example, often delineate routes within family territories, relate information about the movement patterns and locations of game animals, and transmit instructions on how to hunt a particular animal in a specific known environment. As Silko relates, even a story related during "dinner-table conversation" may contain "information of critical importance." She notes that, "hunting stories carefully described key landmarks and locations of fresh water. Thus, a deer-hunt story might also serve as a map. Lost travelers and lost pinon-nut gatherers have been saved by sighting a rock formation they recognize only because they once heard a hunting story describing the rock formation" (1996: 32). The Dena'ina Athabaskan speaker and author Peter Kalifornsky includes several such stories in his collection, *K'tl'egb'i Sukdu: A Dena'ina Legacy*, including "Dnigi Uquch'el'ani, Moose Hunting" and "Guduh K'uhu Ghel'ih, Where I Trapped" (1991: 369, 331). These stories are especially critical in teaching younger generations who may lack the knowledge requisite for subsistence. At the same time, they may also contain larger, but equally pragmatic lessons, about how to interact with family and community in a way that will enable the survival of both the individual and the whole.

One important outgrowth of this aspect of oral traditions has been the development and recognition of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, defined by Fikret Berkes as "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (1999: 8). Berkes, a biologist, has worked closely with the Cree in James Bay to understand the relationship between oral stories, subsistence practices, and the ecological knowledge that this land-based community has accrued over time. The adaptability of cultural knowledge is key to understanding TEK; in the case of the James Bay Cree, for instance, conservation practices are embedded in stories based on longstanding experience, including mistakes made by ancestors, both ancient and recent, which resulted in scarcity of game. TEK is gradually emerging as a field of study within the global scientific community, while indigenous researchers and nations are increasingly emphasizing its importance in their own educational and natural resource management plans.

This capacity of stories to sustain, and transform, human life is a common trope in indigenous oral traditions, as well as in contemporary written literature. As the corn mother story demonstrates, words themselves can be transformative tools. In the Nahuatl version, you'll recall, human beings emerge only after the corn meal is "put into words." Muskogee literary critic and novelist Craig Womack connects the

pragmatic tradition with the “utilitarian” and invocative power of words: “Native artistry is not pure aesthetics, or art for art’s sake: as often as not Indian writers are trying to *invoke* as much as *evoke*.” The active engagement in oral traditions themselves, which can include “prayer, song, drama-ritual, narrative, or story-telling,” demonstrate that words have the potential to “actually cause a change in the physical universe,” and may even “upset the balance of power” (Ortiz, 1981: 9, Womack, 1999: 16–17). N. Scott Momaday, in his classic essay, “The Man Made of Words,” famously suggests that, “We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves” (1981: 167). Peter Kalifornsky translates the Dena’ina conceptualization of this idea in “Ghu K’ghuynisde Egh” or “The Work of the Mind,” writing, “The world is represented in our mind / and becomes a part of us” (1991: 456–7). In “K’ghuynisdi ch’aduch’lagu,” or “Thought: How It May Be,” he instructs his students in the ability to create with the mind, to deliberate, determine, imagine, decide. “Qech’ hq’anġhut,” he concludes in the first stanza, translating this imperative as “Complete your complex thought,” or “literally, ‘move into a cavity,’” suggesting that “language work” is an interactive activity, in which words provoke the emergence of new, comprehensive thoughts in the interior “cavities” of the mind, which can then have direct impact on the external world (1991: 454–5). Building on Momaday, and in concert with Silko, Womack insists that this process is not only a creative act, but an ongoing political activity, as well: “To exist as a nation, the community needs a perception of nationhood, that is, stories (like the migration account) that help them imagine who they are as a people, how they came to be” (1999: 26).

While much of the scholarship on Native oral traditions which arose from nineteenth and twentieth-century ethnography was focused on the preservation and translation of oral artifacts from an alleged “dying” culture, contemporary scholarship seems rooted in the question of how oral traditions contribute to the continuing imagination of nations, and to the renewal of the “intellectual trade routes” which the corn mother story embodies (Warrior, 2005: 181–7). These include collaborations between Native and non-Native scholars, community-based intellectuals, and traditional leaders, emphasizing projects that can be of use to living communities. In line with this active, utilitarian understanding of indigenous oral traditions, storytelling has become a powerful vehicle for what Anishinaabe critic and creative writer Gerald Vizenor terms “survivance,” including the ability of transformative indigenous narratives to “mediate and undermine the literature of dominance” (Weaver, 1997: 141).

As Europeans entered Turtle Island, they also brought with them their own folklore and oral traditions, and colonization required the development of new origin narratives that would root settlers in this land. We are all too familiar with the Pilgrims at Plymouth as the prevailing creation story for the United States, and as George Tinker observes, Christopher Columbus is “the quintessential all-American culture hero” (Weaver, 1997: 15). Cherokee scholar Daniel Justice summarizes a significant point quite eloquently, writing, “The stories told both *by* and *about* Indian people are vital to the processes of peoplehood, as they help to give shape to the social, political, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of tribal life. Stories are never far from

their contexts, as words give shape to the world. 'Sovereignty' is a story, as are 'self-determination' and 'nationhood.' These stories challenge others, like 'Manifest Destiny,' 'savage,' 'assimilation,' 'genocide'" (2006: 207). Thus, the role of oral traditions, since the advent of European settlement, has also been to provide a "countermythology to Amer-European myths that serve colonial interests" as well as an interactive mode for assimilating, comprehending, and resisting the often violent transformations of this world by colonialism (Weaver, 1997: 15). As Acoma Pueblo author Simon Ortiz has written, "Since colonization began in the 15th century with the arrival of the Spaniard priest, militarist, and fortune and slave seeker upon the shores of this hemisphere, Indian song-makers and story-tellers have created a body of oral literature which speaks crucially about the experience of colonization" (Ortiz, 1981: 9–10). This, he insists, "is the only way in which event and experience . . . can become significant and realized in the people's own terms." Furthermore, he affirms that because of its ability to make "meaning" of even the most horrifying of experiences, as well as its capacity to incorporate those elements which are adopted by communities and remade through their creative acts, "through the past five centuries the oral tradition has been the most reliable method by which Indian culture and community integrity have been maintained" (1981: 9). Indeed, Ortiz argues that it is the very persistence, creativity, and adaptability of indigenous oral traditions that has enabled regeneration: "because of the insistence to keep telling and creating stories, Indian life continues, and it is this resistance against loss that has made that life possible" (1981: 11).

Treaty Oratory, Salvage Ethnography, and the Adaptation of "Indian Legends"

As Womack reminds us, the oral tradition also includes the political oratory that governed the social and political interactions among nations, clans, and confederacies on this continent, and which was translated into European languages during the colonial period. Colonial leaders in New England, New York, and Canada were drawn into this tradition by alliance, compelled to participate in indigenous councils, adopting the protocols and rhetoric that were the lingua franca of this land. Agreements between nations were exchanged orally, then "published" in wampum and writing. In the eighteenth century, these "diplomatic dramas" were transferred from the council house to the written page, published by colonial observers such as Benjamin Franklin, and transformed into transatlantic bestsellers. The eloquent and carefully constructed rhetoric of treaty oratory relied on familiar tropes from multiple oral traditions, as well as innovative persuasive speech to transmit images, relate historical relationships, argue for appropriate political strategies, and communicate the will of the speaker's community, clan, or family. The effectiveness of the speakers' oratory was dependent on the aesthetic appeal of the tropes and the images they utilized, their rhetorical elegance, and their ability to effectively engender imagination and agreement among listeners. Published treaties are extensive, multi-voiced, transnational documents, which

include overt, profound statements of indigenous nationhood and complex constructions of the historical relationships among colonial and indigenous communities. The continuation of this tradition of treaty oratory can also be seen in a number of orations published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by Native authors such as Samson Occom (Mohegan), William Apess (Pequot), Elias Boudinot (Cherokee), and John Ross (Cherokee).

In contrast with these earlier texts, the most popular form of “Indian” literature in the nineteenth century (particularly post-Removal, from 1840 on) were the “legends,” “stories,” and “as-told-to” accounts published mainly by ethnographers, but also by Native authors themselves. These texts represented oral traditions captured in brief, childlike form, often divorced from political context and cultural geography, and seemingly frozen in time. They symbolized the “past” of the continent, now fully claimed by the United States and Canada (as well as the Mexican Republic), whose citizens also increasingly claimed “Indians” and their traditions as part of their own national heritage. Yet, while nineteenth-century “salvage” ethnographers seemed obsessed with the desire to capture, collect, and preserve Native “myths” and “legends,” before the envisaged “disappearance” was complete, some Native authors learned to utilize the genre for their own ends. One of the best examples is the publication by Delaware lawyer and author Richard Adams of *A Delaware Indian Legend*, the title and the poetic, romanticized form a mask to launch a contemporary political argument regarding Delaware nationhood and land rights. Lakota writers such as Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin) and Luther Standing Bear, forced to compose “Indian Legends” during their youth in the infamous boarding schools, later published “Stories” which embedded counter-narratives to the “myths” of savagery and vanishing, narratives which were rooted in recent experiences and longstanding oral traditions. In Haudenosaunee territory, Seth Newhouse collaborated with numerous Haudenosaunee leaders and elders in an effort to create a formal written version of the Great Law, originally recorded in wampum, which could be utilized by the Six Nations council, in concert with extant oral tradition. From the same community, the Mohawk author Pauline Johnson, like many Native writers, struggled with her audience’s desire to see her perform a romanticized image of “Indianness,” while writing fiction, such as “As It Was in the Beginning” and “A Red Girl’s Reasoning,” that depicted the experiences of Native women as they grappled with colonialism, through the lens of oral tradition. Authors like Johnson and her Paiute contemporary, Sarah Winnemucca, drew on the power of oratory and their American and Canadian audience’s yearning for “an Indian story” to make their voices heard. While they often had to play the part of “Indian Princess,” women like Winnemucca also served as advocates, utilizing the power of words to enact change. In fact, they are, in many ways, part of a long line of Native orators and writers, including Apess and others mentioned above, who drew on multiple traditions, *including* those they learned in churches and missionary schools, to make a strong case for Native rights and Native continuance during an exceedingly challenging period in indigenous history. (For a much more extensive treatment of the history, literature, and oratory of this period, see Scott Richard Lyons’s chapter – 13.)

“A Map to the Next World”: Multiple Paths in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we have witnessed an influx of Native writers and scholars entering the academy and the publishing houses, from the early break into the world of ethnography and the community-based collection of oral traditions by indigenous scholars like Ella Deloria (Dakota) and Gladys Tantaquidgeon (Mohegan) to the emergence of their intellectual and literal descendants, such as Vine Deloria, Jr., Waziyatawin Angela Wilson (Dakota), and Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel (Mohegan), who have published important and innovative scholarship that includes oral history, complex analysis of sovereignty vis-à-vis colonial governments, and nuanced analysis of indigenous intellectual and cultural traditions, which has the needs of Native communities at its core. As suggested by Muskogee poet Joy Harjo’s evocative poem “A Map to the Next World,” in which she draws on multiple indigenous histories and literatures, there are multiple paths that indigenous people and indigenous oral traditions have taken, and will take in the twenty-first century.

Contemporary indigenous scholarship, for example, draws on oral traditions in crafting multifaceted frameworks for critical analysis. Literary scholars are exploring the relationship of oral tradition to the continuance of indigenous nations and networks, and developing creative interpretive frameworks from complex readings of oral traditions as living texts, from Paula Gunn Allen’s expansive work in the early 1980s to Gerald Vizenor and Greg Sarris’s comparisons of the “vast,” dynamic, open-ended “territory of orality” with postmodernism (Sarris, 1993: 40, Weaver, 1997: 141), as well as Kimberley Blaeser’s application of these ideas to Vizenor’s own writing, to the more recent tribally-specific scholarship of Craig Womack and Daniel Justice, in which the oral traditions of a particular nation – in this case, the Muskogee Creek and Cherokee nations – provide a culturally and geographically precise framework for analysis and form a critical part of the nation-building project. In the cases of all of these authors, they are not only scholars, but creative writers, as well, continuing the imaginative activity that is so vitally present in the “texts” of the oral tradition. Even in the social sciences, oral traditions are being applied as frameworks for analysis. Kanienkehake (Mohawk) political scientist Tai-aiake Alfred applies the Haudenosaunee condolence ceremony to political analysis in his “indigenous manifesto,” *Peace, Power, Righteousness*. In sociology, Cherokee scholar Eva Garrouette applies her theory of “radical indigenism” to the fraught history and contemporary politics of Indian identity, suggesting a critical return to “Original Instructions,” those understandings of family, clan, tribal, and regional identity present in creation and emergence stories, those complex and “specific teachings about the nature of the world and how its members are to live in it” (Garrouette, 2003: 116). This move is not a simple desire to re-capture a “pre-contact” past, but a call for “flexible” and “robust” engagement with the broad understanding of each

community's particular conceptions of kinship, or "relationship to ancestry," and its members' "responsibility to reciprocity" within an extended network of human and non-human relations.

This "responsibility to reciprocity" is also being extended to the relationship between non-Native scholars and indigenous communities. Whereas ethnographers of the past often strived to "study" communities from an objective distance, publishing monographs which would only be valued and seen by other academics, many scholars today strive towards research and publication that will be useful and responsible to communities. Indeed, while salvage ethnographers and their intellectual descendants, in their treatment of texts as artifacts of a culture past or passing, have been most concerned with the preservation and "authenticity" of oral stories in their transference to writing, many Native communities have been concerned with the removal of stories from their contexts, and the unauthorized dissemination of specialized knowledge. Indeed, efforts are under way in multiple communities to bring those stories back home, and to regulate researchers who seek to study within communities. Basso's work with the Apaches at Cibecue is only one of many examples: his research was part of a community project to map the place-names and their locations for the purposes of the White Mountain Apache tribe. Increasingly, these "collaborative strategies" are becoming the norm (Evers and Toelken, 2001: viii).

Language revitalization is one of the most active sites for collaboration, including the work of linguist James Kari with Peter Kalifornsky in Alaska, and that of Tohono O'odham linguist and poet Ofelia Zepeda and the American Indian Language Development Institute at the University of Arizona, which features collaboration among scholars, indigenous creative writers, and tribal representatives, including teachers at tribal colleges and primary/secondary schools. Indeed, perhaps the greatest challenge to the continuance of indigenous languages and oral traditions, in an age of high technology and globalization, is ensuring that the younger generation of children and youth maintains an interest in their Native languages. Community elders, leaders, and educators are currently engaged in a host of innovations that utilize community spaces and new technologies to teach and engage young people in "language work." This was one of Kalifornsky's primary motivations for publishing his own bilingual collection of Dena'ina stories, and it also influences many contemporary authors, including bilingual authors such as Simon Ortiz, who has collaborated with Mayan writer Victor Montejo to publish a trilingual (Keres, English, Spanish) Pueblo story for children, *Rawa 'Kashtyaa'tsi Hiyaani* (*The Good Rainbow Road*), as well as Mayan author Briceida Cuevas-Cob, who composes poetry in Mayan and Spanish, doing her own translation, thereby creating "two channels" for every poem. Today, youth can learn their language not only in their homes, but also in community-based "survival schools," where the local indigenous language is utilized to teach subjects as diverse as history, science, and math; through web-based, interactive programs and cd-roms; in hands-on immersion camps; and through gatherings that bring together young people from multiple, related communities, such as the Anishinaabe "Quiz Bowls," where groups of students compete against each other, giving them the opportunity

to hone, share, and acquire language literacy and cultural knowledge, as well as to socialize with each other. Such programs provide a crucial antidote to the damage caused by the residential and boarding schools throughout North America, which sought to eradicate Native languages and assimilate previous generations of indigenous children.

Finally, one of the most important vehicles for the continuance of oral traditions has been, and will likely continue to be, the written word. In contrast to the days of salvage ethnography, in which scholars so often removed stories from their contexts, today, there is a strong emphasis on publication with a pragmatic purpose: collections of stories published by Native authors, sometimes in collaboration with non-Native scholars and writers, often tribally or regionally specific, which is directly useful to, and utilized by, the community to which the stories belong. These collections often make explicit references to the contemporary community and its local history, in contrast to the popular anthologies of timeless and placeless "Indian legends." Some examples are the collections of Wabanaki stories published by Abenaki author and storyteller Joseph Bruchac, and the children's story, *Muskrat Will Be Swimming*, by Abenaki poet Cheryl Savageau, which, along with their poetry and fiction, have played a vital role in revitalization; *The Way of the Warrior*, a vibrant collection of traditional Crow warrior stories, edited and contextualized by Crow scholar Phoenicia Bauerle, from stories related to, translated, and transcribed by her uncles Henry Old Coyote and Barney Old Coyote, Jr., stories through which, she writes, her children will continue "a tradition that has sustained our people for generations"; Earnest Gouge's *Totkv Mocuse, New Fire: Creek Folktales*, which includes a dvd and cd, through which readers/listeners can read and hear the stories in their original Mvskogee, enabling the interactive learning and interpretation; and Louis Bird's *Telling Our Stories: Omushkego Legends and Histories from Hudson Bay*, a collaborative effort and collection of Cree stories, some of which are also available on the web, in multiple genres that range from creation stories and communal historical narratives to family stories and personal reminiscence, and is fully located, through narrative and detailed maps, in the places to which the stories belong.

As contemporary literature shows, the stories are still alive today, within the people and the places from which they emerged, in which they continue to be told, and through which they weave. Native American literature has been a vital space for the renewal, interpretation and exchange of indigenous oral traditions. While some writers, like Luci Tapahonso, focus on the composition of texts in their indigenous languages, many (including Tapahonso) have also skillfully adapted English and Spanish, not only learning to "reinvent the enemy's language," but to claim them as lingua francas within indigenous homelands that allow for communication and creative expression over a broad expanse of geographic and linguistic territory (Weaver, 1997: 14). As the Nahuatl writer Natalio Hernández Xocoyotzin proclaimed in a 1998 speech, "Spanish is also ours" (Portilla and Shorris, 2001: 389). In both Meso-american literature and the poetry and prose that comes out of Oklahoma, the corn

mother and the serpent continue to travel. Mayan poet, scholar, and political leader Victor Montejo has not only published poetry in which the world of the ancestors and the violent destruction of Mayan communities in Guatemala exist in intricate layers, but has also published his own version of the *Popol Vuh*. Oral traditional figures like the “tie snake,” which appears in the iconography of classical era, frequently appear in the fiction and poetry of Muskogee authors Louis Oliver, Joy Harjo, and Craig Womack, demonstrating not only its deep embeddedness in Muskogee culture, but also its active, ambivalent power in the Oklahoma waters it now calls home. In the fiction of Anishinaabe author Louise Erdrich, readers can meet contemporary versions of culture heroes such as Nanabozho, experience narrative tropes and forms that echo the turtle island creation story, but most importantly, be privy to the kitchen table conversation, another, equally important facet of oral tradition, the network of family and community stories. Thomas King (Cherokee) and Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) reinterpret that beloved figure of anthropologists and literary critics, the “trickster,” who may even emerge as a descendant of Columbus. In Salish author Lee Maracle’s *Daughters Are Forever*, oral tradition not only provides a framework for the form of the novel, but also operates as a vehicle for the transformation and emergence of the protagonist, within a storied network of relations, both human and non-human. N. Scott Momaday combines Kiowa oral tradition, the aesthetic form of the winter count, and the sparse beauty of modernist prose in his own three-voiced (autobiographical, historical, traditional storyteller) imagistic telling of the Kiowa emergence story in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. In Leslie Marmon Silko’s poetry and prose, story emerges as the most powerful force in the universe, with the ultimate ability to create or destroy. As she writes, in the opening of her first, groundbreaking novel, *Ceremony* (1977: 2):

I will tell you something about stories,

{he said}

They aren’t just entertainment.

Don’t be fooled.

They are all we have, you see,

All we have to fight off

illness and death.

You don’t have anything
if you don’t have the stories . . .

. . . See, it is moving.

There is life here

for the people.

And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony

Are still growing.

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The New Worlds and the Old: Transatlantic Politics of Conversion

Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer

“It all goes back to conversion . . . a most ticklish concept and a most loving form of destruction.”

(Louise Erdrich)

Although the New World was a place of newness, marvels, and wonders for the Europeans who began to explore and settle there in the sixteenth century, they tried indefatigably to make it resemble the “old world” in one crucial respect – religious ideology. The conversion of the native population, which was thought to depend upon an initial “civilizing” (read: Europeanizing) process, was not the only motivation for exploration or colonization, but it became a necessary, even fundamental, component of the economic and political conquest of the New World. As historian James Axtell remarks, the evangelism of America lent “apostolic respectability” to imperial activities, but more importantly, constituted a “gunless warfare,” in which the major long-term battles of the “war” for the soul of America, as well as its rich, territorial “body,” were fought (1985: 23, 43). Trade and conversion became interdependent approaches, literally and rhetorically. In the Virginia Company’s neat equation, the English would “buy of them the pearles of earth, and sell to them the pearles of heaven” (Axtell, 1985: 132). In the early modern world, cultural and political identifications were almost unthinkable outside of religious affiliations.

But the process was never, in reality, so neat or unidirectional. The central European players – Spain, France, and England – were all engaged in domestic religious struggles at the time that spilled over into conflicts in the old world and were, in turn, played out in colonial policy, trading alliances with natives, and military engagements in the new. Religious affiliation was complicated by national identity and became more volatile when royal families married across national and religious lines, regimes forced the conversion or expulsion of Jews and Muslims (it is not coincidental that the year of Columbus’s fateful voyage was also the year Spain defeated the Moors and expelled the Jews), and minority sects like the French Huguenots and dissenting English

Protestants suffered persecution, massacres, or committed regicide, and fought civil wars. In the New World, the colonial agents of the imperial powers attempted to convert each other and, in the later centuries, imposed Christianity on the African slaves they brought to the Americas. At the same time, Native Americans continuously adopted and converted Europeans, not so much to native religions but to their entire lifeways. From the beginning, converted Indians missionized to their own people, while others, like Handsome Lake and the Ghost Shirt dancers, rejected Christianity and the cultural assimilation it demanded, and called for a return to traditional native beliefs and practices.

We chose to focus this examination of early American literature in a transatlantic context through the cultural politics of conversion. Encompassing notions of self, otherness, morality, and power, religious conversion was a determining force in many of the early “contact” narratives and provides a central interface for the accommodation, acculturation, and hybridization that come to define “American” identities. In an important way, however, Europe has not stopped importing its “civilizing” religious beliefs to America. In August, 2002, a million people cheered and wept in the streets of Mexico City, as a frail Pope John Paul II canonized Juan Diego, a poor Aztec peasant who had been converted in 1524 by Franciscan missionaries, making him the first Indian to become a saint of the Roman Catholic Church. The ceremony was unusual, incorporating elements of indigenous culture, pre-Catholic religious worship, and readings in seven Indian languages, and took place in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the shrine erected on the spot where in 1531 Diego claimed to have seen several apparitions of the Virgin Mary. Her olive-skinned image, surrounded by flowers, miraculously appeared imprinted on the inside of his tilma, the cloak customarily worn by Indians, which is displayed in the shrine. Despite claims by the Basilica’s abbot that the story and even the man are myth, Pope John Paul hailed Diego who, he said, “facilitated the fruitful meeting of two worlds and became the catalyst for a new Mexican identity.” The Pope continued: “Christ’s message, through his mother, took up the central elements of indigenous culture, purified them and gave them the definitive sense of salvation” (www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/07/22/world/main515876.shtml). Indeed, Diego’s vision has served political as well as religious purposes. In the eighteenth century, Mexican nationalists marched against Spanish colonial rule under the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Many were heartened by the Church’s official recognition of an Indian saint, and the Pope’s accompanying appeals to Mexico and Guatemala to acknowledge the claims of its indigenous peoples. Still, a complicated politics of conversion operates here as it did in 1519, when Cortés and his army entered Tenochtitlan, the dazzling city of lakes, determined to impose the worship of the Virgin on its Aztec population by any means. In his assertion that the “central elements of indigenous culture” had to be “purified,” and its salvational telos clarified, Pope John reveals the Catholic Church’s unchanged belief in the inherent inferiority of Indian religions. Diego’s vision, however, which occurred only a decade after Cortés’s conquest of Mexico, managed to tinge central features of the powerful new religion with traditional indigenous meanings.

His image of the Virgin, in skin color and features, is explicitly native; the spot where she appeared to the pious Diego is a site that was sacred to the Aztec fertility goddess, Tonantzin. According to Samuel Edgerton, this hybridized image signaled the beginning of an “Indian Renaissance” in which indigenous artists, masons, and sculptors used the Christian visual imagery and architecture employed by Spanish missionaries as “theatres of conversion” to express an “American” sense of the divine (2001: 4). The Virgin of Guadalupe has become a major and pervasive emblem of Mexican American identity, appearing not only in churches and home altars, but on picket lines, public murals in the barrios, low-rider cars customized by Chicanos, and in Chicano/a literature (*Heath Anthology*, 2009: 165; Anzaldúa, 1987).

Juan Diego’s relation of his visions was and remains a visual and oral tradition. It first appeared in print in Náhuatl, the language of the Aztecs, in 1649, more than a century after the events it records. Important as the account of the beginning of a hybridized New World religious practice, it also displays some key elements of narratives of conversion. Like the archetypal Christian conversion – Paul on the road to Damascus – the subject is stopped in its quotidian progress by some ineluctable outside force and made to “turn away” from its old life to a new way of being. Sensory experience – hearing the voice of God, seeing the Virgin mother – is requisite to this dramatic geography, for it registers the extent to which the human realm has been entered and touched by the suprahuman. To be converted is to experience a change in one’s essence – character, nature, form or function, according to the OED – but it is also a reorientation, a “turning or directing” or, more precisely, having the self, mind, heart, turned and directed towards another object or view: from sin and self to goodness and God, from barbarism to civilization and, ironically, from ancient traditions of the “new” world to newly imposed traditions from the old. Ancient Aztec prophecy described new gods coming from the east, like the sun, and like the conquistadores of Mexico. By contrast, Patricia Caldwell has argued that the early New England Puritan conversion narratives, which are mostly transcriptions of oral testimonies by ordinary male and female immigrants from England, constitute the “beginnings” of a specifically “American” (versus English) expression, shaped indelibly by the experience of coming to the new land. In this light, Juan Diego’s narrative is a powerful *returning* to the indigenous ground of America.

From the moment he reached the New World under the Spanish flag, Christopher Columbus was driven by two obsessions: the conversion of the Native peoples to the Christian faith and the potential vastness of the natural wealth of the new continent. His letter to Ferdinand and Isabella, describing his initial exchange of commodities with the Indians, reveals the interdependence of these two goals:

They also traded cotton and gold for pieces of bows, bottles, jugs and jars, like persons without reason, which I forbade because it was very wrong; and I gave to them many beautiful and pleasing things that I had brought with me, no value being taken in exchange, in order that I might the more easily make them friendly to me, that they might be made worshippers of Christ, and that they might be full of love towards our king, queen, and prince, and the whole Spanish nation; and that they might be zealous to

search out and collect, and deliver to us those things of which they had plenty, and which we greatly needed.

(Castillo and Schweitzer, 2001: 25)

Judged by a European standard, which Columbus regarded as unquestionable, the natives appear virtually insane or childish, which requires the paternalistic step of protecting them from their own incapacity. On the other hand, Columbus regards his own thinking as perfectly reasonable: giving these strangers “beautiful and pleasing things” without, he says magnanimously, the expectation of material return, but imagining that the ensuing friendliness would convert them to Christianity, and positively dispose them to the rule of foreign and, to them, unimaginable monarchs. Finally, the zealotry Columbus wishes to inspire is not wholly spiritual but directed at material gain: the natives’ willingness to collect and deliver “things” desired by the Europeans – gold, silver, spices, and other merchantable items. Tzvetan Todorov observes that Columbus was obsessed with gold because he ultimately wanted to finance a campaign to recapture the holy city of Jerusalem, and that the natives he thought so tractable may have directed him in his fruitless search for gold from island to island in order to get rid of him (1984: 8).

Why couldn’t Columbus “see” the Taino Indians he stumbled upon – that is, see their startling, apparent differences from Europeans not as lunacy or paradisaical innocence or inferiority? What was it about his frame of reference that made these welcoming people seem without reason, religion, social structures, or human agency? In his important essay on the emergence of creole identity in New Spain, “Meditaciones sobre el Criollismo,” Edmundo O’Gorman observes that, unlike their English counterparts, Spanish settlers lived among institutions and ways of thinking that they transplanted intact to the New World, without regard to the specificity of the new environment. They imposed upon the various Indian tribes they encountered in the Americas Aristotle’s notion, made current by various debates about the legitimacy of slavery and the use of force in conversion, that certain people were destined, ontologically for “natural slavery,” to be ruled by others and perform drudgery (*Politics*, Bk 1, ch. 2). In this ideologically rigid frame of thought, Spanish culture was considered innately superior, even in the face of ample evidence to the contrary, such as the advanced state of Aztec and Incan culture reported by explorers. Although Columbus initially imagined he could convert the island Indians with love rather than force, this quickly changed when they resisted, as indigenous people did sporadically throughout the history of New Spain. However, even his initial optimism prevents Columbus from imagining the people he meets as anything more than “good and intelligent servants.” Traveling with Columbus was a Dominican priest, Bartolomé de Las Casas, whose massive *Historia de las Indias* (begun 1527 and not published until 1875 but widely circulated in Europe as *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*) records the horrors and injustice that come to characterize Spanish modes of intercultural encounter.

Transatlantic colonialism has often been characterized as the unidirectional flow of language, institutions, and ideological structures from the active, stable, economically

and technologically advanced colonizers to the passive, inarticulate, barbaric colonized. Recent scholarship has deconstructed this binary in order to reconfigure colonialism as a series of interactions between different cultures in what Mary Louise Pratt calls “the contact zone” (1992: 7). Similarly, Annette Kolodny urges fellow Americanists to re-define the term “frontier” that prevailed in our critical literature and usually denoted an illusory line where civilization met – and defeated – savagery. In Spanish, as Kolodny points out, the term *la frontera* is more capacious and dynamic, connoting “the borderlands, that liminal landscape of changing meanings on which distinct human cultures first encounter one another’s ‘otherness’ and appropriate, accommodate, or domesticate it through language” (1995: 17). These encounters, however, are often plagued by unequal conditions which produce what Michel de Certeau describes as the “tactical” appropriation of European systems of domination by Native peoples. These appropriations, he argues, are subversive and transgressive, not because the natives alter systems of domination, but because they manipulate these systems, to which they were meant to submit, for radically different ends. Most of these reconfigurations assume that Native or colonized peoples possess agency and are not merely victims silenced by the master narrative of history. Rather, this paradigm shift enables us to avoid reductive, Manichaean interpretations of colonial realities and invites dynamic, interactive readings. De Certeau posits rhetoric as one such set of tactical ruses through which oppressed peoples struggle for symbolic power.

One of the few indigenous narratives we have is an extraordinary document by the Peruvian historian and writer, Guamán Poma de Ayala. The original manuscript, which was discovered in the Danish Royal Archives in Copenhagen in 1908, is dated Cuzco, 1613, when its author was about 90 years old. It consists of approximately 800 pages of text written in a mixture of Quechua and Spanish, and nearly 400 captioned line drawings. Little is known about this author-illustrator, who claims in the narrative to be descended from an aristocratic Yarovilca family with ties both to the Incas and the conquering Spanish forces. Beginning with a history of the world written expressly to include the native peoples of America, Guamán Poma goes on to discuss Andean history and culture in considerable detail, and to describe the Spanish conquest from the viewpoint of the Native elites. Although he foregrounds the importance of writing and printing as a mode of dissemination, stating in his Prologue, “I chose the Castilian tongue for the writing of my work, as our Indians of Peru are without letters or writing of any kind” (1978: 19), his text is a true hybrid. It melds European narrative conventions such as the *relación*, intended to provide information about the New World, and the *crónica*, a more complex narrative elaboration of the information provided in the *relación*, with Quechua visual and rhetorical traditions, such as the *kipu* or series of colored and knotted strings which were used as an aid to the transmission of oral narratives, and the Quechua *quilca*, which originally designated the act of drawing or painting, but after the Conquest referred to a book or writing.

Stating that the purpose of his narrative is to benefit all faithful Christians, both Spanish and native, Guamán Poma represents himself as an impartial, conscientious

historian who recognizes the plurality of “sources” for an accurate version of events: “In my work I have always tried to obtain the most truthful accounts, accepting those which seemed to be substantial and which were confirmed from various sources” (1978: 20). Despite his avowedly dispassionate tone, however, Guamán Poma does not disguise his outrage at the corruption and violence of the colonial administration, but often presents it through the artful use of rhetorical ruses to encode resistance to colonial authority. For example, the document concludes with a fictional dialogue between Guamán Poma and King Philip III of Spain. Not only does the aging Indian advance himself as an expert on the “true state of affairs in Peru,” thus claiming validity for the perspective of the colonized, but he presumes to speak in the King’s voice, and furthermore, puts the King in the position of the inquirer requesting information from a subject whose humanity he, in reality, might not even grant. In this way, Guamán Poma reverses the unidirectional, dictatorial power structure of colonization in which colonizers speak for, about, and to the colonized.

This structure allows the subaltern to frame pointed questions that elicit detailed responses which depict the wretched treatment and despair of the King’s Indian subjects at the hands of corrupt Spanish administrators, remind the King of pronouncements issued by his own Council, and suggest reasonable remedies. For example, when the “King” asks how the Indians who have fled can be persuaded to return to their homes, Guamán Poma argues that they should be given clearly demarcated farm land, and that taxes should be collected by “one salaried official only,” which

could well be the Indian chief. For it is a fact that we chiefs have never joined in rebellions and have proved ourselves to be remarkably loyal subjects. We handed over ourselves and our vassals to Your Majesty, together with the silver mines of Potosi, the gold-mines of Carabaya and the mercury mines of Huancavelica. For all this Your Majesty ought to show us some mark of gratitude.

(1978: 207)

We gave you the wealth you coveted without a fight, he reminds his sovereign; don’t we deserve to occupy an administrative position that would fairly impose your rule and give the native peoples the opportunity to support themselves? When the “King” probes into Guamán Poma’s opposition to priestly salaries, he replies:

Your Majesty, the first priest of our religion was Jesus Christ, who lived on earth as a poor man, and his Apostles did the same. None of those holy men asked for salaries, but they were content to live by the charity of others. By the same token parish priests can manage quite well without collecting taxes or setting themselves up as men of property. If they do not care for such a way of life, Your Majesty should consult with the Pope in order to admit Indians to the priesthood. Being good Christians our people will not require any salary and the saving which Your Majesty will make can be used for the general good of the Church.

(1978: 207)

Embracing Christianity also means embracing its morality. Here, the convert dares to preach to the converter, holding his “superiors” up to their own doctrinal and behavioral standards. It is a strategy that, for example, the Ghanaian slave Phillis Wheatly will use in pre-Revolutionary Boston, when she chides the privileged men of Harvard for their dissipations, thereby establishing her own Christian *bona fides* and authority to speak.

A century and a half later, the remarkable Mexican nun, Juana Inés de la Cruz continued to critique and resist the strong-arm tactics of the colonial Church in the form of dramatic debate and dialogue. Born out of wedlock to a Basque landowner and a creole mother, Juana Inés developed a passion for learning and became a favorite at the viceregal court in Mexico City because of her brilliance and beauty. Unable to attend University, and unwilling to subordinate herself in marriage, she entered a convent at 21 without a strong calling but in order to devote herself to study and writing. She wrote and produced several plays for her sister nuns and aristocratic guests. Spanish dramatic conventions of the day called for plays to be prefaced by a dialogic verse introduction called a *loa*. In the *loa* for the play, *The Divine Narcissus*, amid an elegant baroque play of light and shadow, reality and illusion, Sor Juana staged a revealing drama between the forces that shaped colonial Mexico. She creates four personifications which are divided into two pairs, one European and the other American: Zeal and Religion represent Spanish imperial hegemony, while America and Occident are of Mexican origin. America is characterized as an aristocratic Aztec woman in Native dress, wearing the *mantas* and *huipiles* customarily linked to the performance of the *tocotín*, a Native song, while Occident is described as a gallant Indian wearing a crown. Religion is presented as a Spanish Lady, while Zeal is a bellicose and somewhat henpecked Spanish soldier. Each pair is similarly gender-balanced: Religion and America are female, while Zeal and Occident are male. However, in both pairs, the females are far more nuanced and dominant, while Occident is pleasant and passive and Zeal is a blustering bully.

The play begins with a Native dance dedicated to the Aztec God of Seeds. Occident articulates the Aztec vision of the interdependence of human beings and the earth, while America characterizes the God of Seeds in terms that recall the Christian Eucharist: “He makes a paste of His own flesh / and we partake with veneration . . . / and so our Soul he purifies / of all its blemishes and stains” (1977: 201). Religion, who proves to be the consummate hypocrite, appeals to “mighty” Occident and “beautiful” America to open their eyes and abandon what she labels as “this unholy cult / which the Devil doth incite” (201) in order to follow Christianity. She is backed by Zeal, who describes himself as the defender of the true Religion, a minister from God whose role is to castigate the Aztecs’ “wickedness” and “error” with military might (209). Occident and America meet this presumption with open defiance. In a biting inversion of European colonial rhetoric, America calls the invaders savages:

Oh mad, blind, barbaric man,
disturbing our serenity,

you bring confusing arguments
to counter our tranquillity;
you must immediately cease,
unless it is your wish to find
all here assembled turned to ash,
with no trace even on the wind. (209)

Her defiance provokes an armed invasion; she and Occident are forced to retreat before Religion and Zeal.

America unmasks the compassionate solution of conversion offered by Religion and, through a dazzling Baroque play of words, asserts the rights of conquered peoples to ideological, if not physical, resistance:

For though my person come to harm,
and though I weep for liberty,
my liberty of will, will grow
and I shall still adore my Gods. (217)

She is echoed by Occident, who declares:

. . . though captive I may moan in pain,
your will will never conquer mine,
and in my heart I will proclaim:
I worship the great God of Seeds! (217)

When Occident attempts to explain to Religion that this Mexican deity is also the source of spiritual salvation, Religion reacts with horror, calling this idea a demonic “counterfeit,” and a product of the “wily Serpent, sly Reptile” and “seven-headed Hydra.” In an aside, however, she determines to use this very same stratagem: “Now if God will grace my tongue, / this same deceit I shall refine / and use your arguments to win” (221). Rather than acknowledging Occident’s arguments for the peaceful co-existence of both religions, however, Religion invokes their similarities to justify conversion and the eradication of native worship. With an apparently expedient recapitulation in mind, Occident pleads for more information about this new God, and Religion replies that she will give him a metaphor, “an idea clad in rhetoric of many colours” embodied by the play, *The Divine Narcissus*, whose theme is the significance of the Eucharist (237). The *loa* ends on a wonderfully ambivalent note, with America, Occident, and Zeal singing the praise of the God of Seeds and “All” blessing the day they came to know him (239).

Contrasting sharply with the Spanish missionaries’ cruel strategy of complete hispanicization of native peoples, imposed by military force, as the necessary prelude to conversion, the French in North America eventually discovered the truth of Pierre de Charlevoix’s recommendation that “The best mode of Christianizing them was to avoid Frenchifying them” (*History of New France* 4: 198, in Axtell, 1985: 70). Beginning

in 1615, the Récollect friars endeavored to repeat in Canada the enormous successes of their fellow Franciscans in New Spain where thousands of Indians had been baptized, but their pre-conceived notions about the savagery and stupidity of Native Americans prevented them. The Jesuits, however, who arrived in the 1640s, quickly perceived the intelligence of the natives, but also learned from experience that the Algonquins, Montagnis, and Abenakis who could be tempted into settling and farming land on reserves set aside for them along the St. Lawrence River, either left during seasonal migration, or were corrupted by the brandy sellers and other purveyors of Old World vices. They recognized the natives' tenacious belief in the superiority of their own culture, and came to realize that the most effective conversion strategy, which they used to good effect in other parts of the world, was to adapt Catholicism to the Indians' ways. An order dedicated to poverty, celibacy, and peace, who wanted neither the Indians' land nor their women, the Jesuits sent zealous, highly educated missionaries to live and travel with native groups, learn their languages and their ways, gain their respect, and win them to an alien spirituality by the force of their own example.

The "black robes" as they were called, from the ankle-length soutanes worn by the Jesuit order, were small in number – only 115 Jesuits came to New France in the seventeenth century – but they were proportionately more successful than their most proximate European competitor, the English, whose tactics of Anglicization and praying towns did not accommodate native culture. Historians speculate that tribal ties weakened by epidemics brought by the colonizers, intertribal warfare, and the economic incursions of French, Dutch, and English fur-traders fueled the achievements of the Jesuits in Huron territory. Unwilling to baptize converts en masse, as the Spanish did, the Jesuits fought for each individual soul and provided ongoing moral and spiritual support that produced devout, resilient, and even excessively fervent disciples, especially among women. One such neophyte was Kateri Tekakwitha, a Mohawk woman born in 1656 who died at the age of 26 after subjecting herself to hair shirts, extended prayer standing in freezing water, ashes mixed into her food, and painfully austere living conditions. Like Mexico's Juan Diego, Kateri has become an enduring emblem of Catholic faith and a candidate for sainthood, and like him, she animated the rituals of the Church with the breath of Iroquois beliefs and mourning practices.

We know of Kateri's extremities and native men and women like her because the Jesuits understood the redoubled power of proselytizing through *reading* about the martyrdom of proselytes and the edifying struggles of converts. Between 1632 and 1673, the order published a series of annual reports in Paris on the progress of the missions in New France. Compiled by Jesuit superiors from letters and diaries received "from the field" by missionaries, and further edited by the Jesuits in Paris, these accounts were widely circulated and avidly read throughout France. The relation of 1647 reports that when Father Isaac Jogues returned to France in 1644 after his second captivity, the French Queen, "having heard mention of his suffering, says aloud: 'Romances are feigned; but here is a genuine combination of great adventures.' She wished to see him; her eyes were touched with compassion at the sight of the cruelty of the Hiroquois"

(*Jesuit Relations*, 31: 104–5). Like the Puritan captivity narratives that became a popular staple of Anglo-American literature and, in an interesting reversal of influence, are now considered a source for the development of the English novel, the Jesuit relations set tales of passionate human commitment to transcendent ideals against a backdrop of danger, exoticism, and violence. It is important, however, to distinguish between these two culturally distinct versions of the genre. The Jesuit fathers, while sometimes falling captive to marauding tribes, chose to live with the people they were intent on converting and gloried in their suffering and torture. When rescued from death, they often returned to their posts and refused to leave. François Mercier, a Jesuit superior, advised, “As God made himself man in order to make men God’s, a Missionary does not fear to make himself a Savage, so to speak, with them, in order to make them Christians” (*Jesuit Relations*, 51: 265). An important hedge against this dangerous blurring of identity for the French Jesuits was the disciplined, self-conscious capturing of their experiences in words, which literally and figuratively carried them back to the Old World.

Many native converts were also held up as exempla. No less than the pious Puritan minister, Cotton Mather, provides a fascinating confirmation of Jesuit success, and a glimpse into the European competition over conversion and piety, in his narrative of the captivity of Hannah Dustan. This Puritan goodwife was taken prisoner in a raid on the town of Haverhill during King William’s War (1688–98), and forced to march towards Canada with a family of 12 Indians eager to collect the bounty on English prisoners offered by Frontenac, the colonial governor of Canada. Though only a week up from childbed, Dustan and her nurse Mary Neff killed her captors in their sleep, and escaped with their scalps. In relating their story to a Puritan audience, Mather indicts Puritan backsliders by “publishing” about the Indian family “what these poor women assure me. ‘Tis this: in obedience to the instructions which the French have given them, they would have *prayers* in their family no less than thrice every day; in the morning, at noon, and in the evening; nor would they ordinarily let their children *eat* or *sleep*, without first saying their prayers.” Although he quickly brands these converts “*idolaters*,” and “like the rest of their white brethren, *persecutors*” (*Heath Anthology*, 2009: 513) who ultimately got what they deserved by succumbing to the seductions of “papists,” Mather is clearly impressed by and jealous of the apparently genuine piety of this “heathen” family.

The cultural dislocation produced by conversion, however, was often disastrous, despite the positive spin imposed by European redactors. The Jesuit relation of 1670–1, for example, contains a story entitled, “The Constancy of Marie Oendraka in her Afflictions, and her Zeal in Allowing No Sin in her Family,” though from another perspective, the virtue of “constancy” supposedly illustrated here is eclipsed by the extremity of the “zeal.” Father Etienne Dablon describes the tribulations of a Huron widow, whose son, at age four or five, became comatose as the result of eating a poisonous plant:

She took him in her arms, carried him into the Chapel, and prostrating herself before the Holy Image of our Lady of Foy [faith], said: “Ah, Holy Virgin, my dear Child is dead. Receive his soul, I pray you, in your bosom, and be henceforth a Mother to him in

Heaven. Your well-beloved Son had given him to me for a little while. Graciously permit me to-day, O Mother of mercy, to return this innocent soul to him by your own hands." Wonderful to relate, and to the surprise of all present, scarcely had she uttered these few words mingled with sighs and sobs, when the Child regained consciousness, and showed such vigor and strength that he immediately vomited the poison from which he was suffering.

(*Jesuit Relations*, 55: 21)

Marie's faith in a Christian view of the afterlife, her very resignation of her child to the "heavenly Mother," in words that strike contemporary readers as coached or canned, produce the miracle of his "resurrection." At about the same time, in frontier settlements of the Massachusetts Bay colony, Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor struggled to comprehend similar losses but without the consolation of divine maternity. Taylor, an orthodox Puritan minister and poet, relates how he bows to God's "will," and gladly relinquishes the precious "flowers" of his seed when he perceives that their deaths are part of his own salvation: "take, Lord, they're thine. / I piecemeale pass to Glory bright in them" ("Upon Wedlock," ll. 39–40). Bradstreet, a laywoman from a prominent Puritan family, wrote poetic responses to the early deaths of several of her grandchildren that are tonally indeterminate. Her embrace of silence ("With dreadful awe before Him let's be mute, / Such was His will, but why, let's not dispute") echoes the speechlessness imposed on Puritan women in worship; she opens up but refuses to explore spaces of resistance ("On My Dear Grandchild Simon Bradstreet," ll. 5–6).

By contrast, Marie's unbending adherence to Catholic doctrines of bodily sinfulness produces a travesty of maternal care. Father Dalbon recounts:

Her zeal in banishing sin from her family, and in filling with a horror of it all who belong to her, is not less admirable than her courage and constancy in affliction. While attending the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, one day, she felt uneasy and anxious in her mind at having left her son all alone in her cabin. To relieve her anxiety, she bade her daughter to go and see what was taking place there. As soon as the girl entered the cabin, she perceived that her mother had been Divinely inspired for she caught her little brother, and one of his comrades of his own age, in an act of indecency bordering on impurity. Giving a loud scream, as if the house had been on fire, she assailed those two little culprits with feet and hands, and drove them into the street. The mother hastened home at the noise, and, being informed of the matter, caused a good handful of rods to be prepared, in order to inflict punishment for the offence at the close of Mass, in sight of all the people. This purpose she executed, but with such rigor that a good old woman, a relative of hers, filled with compassion, snatched the Child from her hands, and led him into the church, where she made him ask God's forgiveness. She then took him back to his mother, who repulsed him, and sent him away from her, – assigning him his place in a corner of the hearth on the ashes, and forbidding him to leave it or to lie down elsewhere until he had expiated his offence. Coming in at this juncture, I saw the Child in the veritable attitude of a culprit, his countenance dejected and his eyes lowered. "See, Father," said that good woman to me, "is not that a real Ondechronronnon?" – meaning a denizen of Hell.

(*Jesuit Relations*, 55: 27–9)

When Marie consults Father Dablon about the appropriate duration of punishment for her son, the priest suggests that the child be made to fast for two days without eating or drinking, but this, she replies, is not enough for “a little wretch who ought to suffer perpetual hunger and thirst with the demons” (31). Father Dablon reports that he feels pity for the humiliated child, whom he considered particularly bright and advanced for his age. To spare him unnecessary suffering, Dalbon suggests to Marie an elaborate subterfuge: that her daughter give food surreptitiously to the boy. Marie refuses and deprives the child of food and water for more than twenty-four hours, until he begins to show symptoms of “marked weakness,” at which point she takes him to the priest so that he might confess his sins (*Jesuit Relations*, 55: 31). With his suggestion of the subterfuge, Dalbon implicitly condemns his convert’s horrific behavior, which his own religious teachings have unleashed, and also patronizes her faith: going through the motions, he implies, is good enough. He holds her up as a model of faith and “constancy,” but does not perceive the ways in which the “horror” of sin she purveys to her family is a reflection of the underside of his own doctrine, transposed. Marie has assimilated Catholic religious ideology to the point where she parrots European stereotypes of Indians in labeling her own son a “demon” and is prepared to starve him in order to save his soul.

The French and their dedicated Indian converts tried, more than their English rivals in North America, and with some success, to convert other Europeans, especially children. Thus, the violent anti-Indian feeling that animates early Anglo-American cultural productions was fueled by the Puritans’ particular hatred and fear of “popery” and the political settlement it implied. John Williams, for example, a well-connected Puritan minister in the frontier town of Deerfield, Massachusetts, who in 1704 was taken up to Montreal with several of his children by Abenakis, French Canadians, and Caughnawaga Mohawks, spent only eight weeks with his Abenaki “master” and the rest of his two and a half years of captivity in French Canadian Catholic communities. In his widely read captivity narrative, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion* (1707), he describes being very much “affected” by the sight of English children at Fort St. Francis who were “in habit very much like Indians and in manner very much symbolizing with them,” that is, adopting their dress, language and, probably, religious practices (*Heath Anthology*, 2009: 527). Both Catholics and Protestants regarded these “symbols” as supremely powerful, concentrating within specific gestures whole realms of supernatural meaning. Williams recounts how his Abenaki captor

took hold of my hand to force me to cross myself, but I struggled with him and would not suffer him to guide my hand; upon this he pulled off a crucifix from his own neck and bade me kiss it, but I refused once again. He told me he would dash out my brains with his hatchet if I refused. I told him I should sooner choose death than to sin against God; then he ran and caught up his hatchet and acted as though he would have dashed my brains out. Seeing I was not moved, he threw down his hatchet, saying he would first bite off all my nails if I still refused; I gave him my hand and told him I was ready to suffer. He set his teeth in my thumb-nails and gave a grip with his teeth, and then said, “No good minister, no love God, as bad as the devil,” and so left off.

(*Heath Anthology*, 527–8)

These struggles over gestural and behavioral compliance were the layperson's version of doctrinal disputes, and the reversals here are telling. Williams represents himself ready to suffer bodily torture and martyrdom like Catholic saints and his Jesuit counterparts. His frustrated, disgusted, and apparently pious Indian captor calls him a "devil." Williams's French captors used good meals, improved living conditions, and the promise of reunion with his children as the bait to catch his soul. The Jesuit superior even boasted that when the War of Spanish Succession, known to the English as Queen Anne's War, had put a Catholic king, James II, back on the English throne, all of New England would be forced to convert (*Heath Anthology*, 2009: 530).

Recent scholarship has alerted us to the extent to which European colonial endeavors were inextricably tied to the consolidation of early modern national identities. Tom Scanlan, for instance, begins his study of English colonial writing in 1583, the year of the publication, in English, of Las Casas's *Brevíssima relación*, which was the source of the "Black Legend" of Spanish colonial atrocities. England, eager to compete with Spanish successes, shaped its colonial policy, he argues, especially its treatment of native populations, in opposition to coercive Catholic methods. Read in this light, colonial writing is double-voiced, narrating on one level, the literal events of colonization, and divulging an allegory of national desires on another (Scanlan, 1999: 3). Both the privately funded Chesapeake Bay explorations and the royally chartered New England settlements paid lipservice to promulgating the gospel among the benighted natives who, as the younger Richard Hakluyt told Queen Elizabeth, "crye oute unto us . . . to come and helpe them" (Axtell, 1985: 133). Even so, neither group went about missionizing with much enthusiasm; the Massachusetts Puritans, who painstakingly pursued the salvation of English souls, did not mount their first efforts at native conversion until 1644, though in 1629, the year before they departed for the New World, they adopted as the design on their seal an Indian calling out the very words Hakluyt had miraculously heard from across the ocean half a century earlier.

The English Protestants resembled the Spaniards they so reviled in one crucial respect: most of them believed that the Indians had to be "civilized" before they could reasonably accept Christianity, which could only be accomplished by the complete assimilation of the natives to English culture and sovereignty. One of the earliest English missionaries was the minister John Eliot, who learned Algonquian, and by 1646 was able to preach to the Massachusetts and Wampanoags in their own language. But Eliot also believed the Indians had to live settled lives, doing agriculturally-based work, adopt English manners and customs, and read Scripture. Indefatigably, he raised funds to set up "praying towns" for native neophytes that were patterned on Biblical models, and developed an orthography for Algonquian, an oral language, which he used to translate the Bible, the Bay Psalm Book, and other tracts on conversion, for instruction in reading. In 1671, just before the outbreak of hostilities between the settlers and the Wampanoags known by the English as "King Philip's War" (1675–6), Eliot published *Indian Dialogues for Their Instruction in that Great Service of Christ*, a bid to win attention for his missionary efforts, which had been largely ignored in New England. However, Eliot's assimilationist approach was never widely successful, and during the

bitter conflict with the Wampanoags, panicky and infuriated colonists burned Indian bibles, rounded up and killed many native converts, and destroyed many of the praying towns, which they thought bred hypocrites and harbored traitors.

One vociferous opponent to the Bay's treatment of Native Americans was Roger Williams, who ran afoul of the Commonwealth's ruling elite by advocating the separation of church and state and condemning the settlers' penchant for land-grabbing from the Indians. Exiled from the Bay's territory in 1636, Williams fled to the Narragansett Bay where he established Providence, and lived and traded peacefully with the native inhabitants. Williams also composed an orthography of the Narragansett language, a dialect of Algonquian, entitled *A Key into the Language of America* (1643). In the letter that prefaces the *Key*, Williams casts suspicion on Puritan intentions concerning "that great Point of [Indian] *Conversion*" which he says is "so much to bee longed for, and by all *New-English* so much pretended, and I hope in Truth" (1973: 87). That is, the Bay colonists noisily "claim" and "profess" themselves concerned with native souls (the seventeenth-century meaning of "pretend" was not yet synonymous with "feigned" according to the OED), but have yet to prove their sincerity. The question, as Williams reveals, has an "edge from the boast of the Jesuits in *Canada* and *Maryland*, and especially from the wonderfull conversions made by the Spaniards and Portugalls in the *West-Indies*" (1973: 88). Despite this New World apostolic competition, Williams refuses on principle to convert his native acquaintances or translate Scripture, although he claims that "proper expressions concerning the Creation of the World, and mans Estate, and in particular theirs also, which from myselfe many hundredths of times, great numbers of them have heard with great delight, and great conviction" (194). Rather, he believed in the "preparatory mercy" of the conversations that took place during daily interaction and exchange, and that "by such converse it may please the *Father of Mercies* to spread *civilitie* (and in his owne most holy season) *Chistianitie*" (84; his emphases).

The divergent attitudes of Williams and Eliot on native conversion were, in large part, driven by differences in their theology and millennialism, but we can observe these differences by comparing their treatment of the dialogue form which both used to frame their native materials. One of Williams's aims is to facilitate interracial "commerce" for mutual "profit," in the multiple meanings of those allegorical terms, by teaching the English settlers how to communicate with native peoples and by providing them with insight into and knowledge about native cultural practices. Although he is sometimes critical of these practices, he does not conclude that the English have a monopoly on "civility." In fact, the poem ending the very first chapter, "Of Salutation," upbraids "Uncourteous Englishmen" and especially the "Sonnes of God," that is, Christians, for their inhumane treatment of dissenters like Williams (1973: 99). At the end of Chapter Seven, he declares: "Nature knows no difference between *Europe* and *Americans* in blood, birth, bodies &c. God having of one blood made all mankind, *Acts* 17 [26]" (p. 133), alluding to the teachings of Jesus. The only difference is the "second birth" of the soul through grace, of which the "proud English" need to "Make sure" or, he warns, the "Heaven ope to Indians wild [will be] shut to thee" (p. 133). The very

structure of his chapters, what Williams calls “an Implicite Dialogue,” emphasizes the basic equality of the two cultures through the parallel columns of words – Narragansett on the left, English on the right – that dominate the pages. Furthermore, the horizontal dialogue between different cultures is augmented by mini-narratives which emerge as we read down the columns. Because it is often unclear who is speaking and to whom, the “implicite dialogue” minimizes the importance of individual speakers and foregrounds the importance of exchange between subjects whose “opacity,” to use Stephen Greenblatt’s resonant phrase, compels them – and us – to “acknowledge the independence and integrity of [their] construction of reality” (Greenblatt, 1976: 575).

By contrast, Eliot’s *Indian Dialogues* stage monolingual conversations between native missionaries sent to convert their unconverted brethren. Although Eliot preached in Algonquian and promoted the use of Scripture translated into Algonquian, he presents these exhortations in English. This may have been part of his program of assimilation and so forecasts a future without native language, but it also suggests that these dialogues were written for English, not native, consumption. Published just after the restoration of a Catholic-leaning king to the English throne, divisive debates in the Bay colony over the Halfway Covenant in 1662, which made baptism an inherited privilege of the children of founding church members, and growing fears of a “decline” in piety, Eliot’s *Indian Dialogues* serve the larger function, according to Scanlan, of re-converting the colonial settlers (Scanlan, 1999: 186). In this light, the “opacity” of the Indians gives way to their erasure as they become allegorical vehicles for the promulgation of white salvation. Bolstering this point is the fact that the four dialogues are mostly invention and wish-fulfilment, though some of the speakers were disciples who were instructed and shaped by Eliot. The third dialogue imagines a conversation between two disciples and the Wampanoag sachem Metacom (aka King Philip) that depicts the defiant and unrepentent leader on the verge of accepting Christianity.

Eliot’s dialogues suggest that, for Indians in the New World, religious conversion constituted what James Ronda describes as “cultural suicide” (1977: 67). One of the “penitents” in Eliot’s first dialogue attempts to counter his kinsman’s evangelical exhortations by confessing: “I feel my heart broken and divided. I know not what to do . . . the greatest difficulty that I yet find, is this. I am loth to divide myself from my friends and kindred. If I should change my course and not they, then I must leave and forsake their company . . .” (Eliot, 1980: 89). This complaint illustrates the extent to which Christian conversion, despite the camaraderie and commonality it may have produced among bands of neophytes, who followed a pre-arranged “morphology of conversion,” represented a realignment which was not just social, but epistemological and metaphysical: from communalism to individualism, from an “I” defined by its membership in a tribe or clan to an “I” defined primarily by a relationship with Christ, as well by other atomizing, individualizing, and possessive economies that “civilization” implied. It represented not only the “death” of the “old man in Adam” as the Puritans quaintly described the conversion of Europeans, but the demise of an ancient way of life and culturally specific forms of subjectivity. In 1524, the Aztec chiefs made

the same argument to the Franciscan friars who came to convert them after the conquest of Mexico, asking: “are we to destroy the ancient order of life?” (Klor de Alva). Unlike Williams, whose dialogues perform an allegory of linguistic co-habitation, Eliot’s monological dialogues stage Indians advocating and accepting self-division and cultural genocide. The (il)logic of these colonial strategies of representation is summed up by a native penitent in Eliot’s final dialogue who, through Christianity, experiences himself completely “other” than he was formerly, and exclaims, seemingly unaware of the painful irony of his displacing words: “I am come into a new world” (Eliot, 1980: 161).

Christianity would, in the mind of missionaries like Eliot who ventriloquizes through this character, provide the natives of the New World themselves with a “new world” of identification and “redeemed” subjectivity. It would solve the dilemma of the colonized/convert’s agonized sense of division by creating a deep loathing for that former, sinful self – in this case, an Indian self. We have only to read the autobiographical accounts of Indian missionaries like Samson Occom in the mid-eighteenth century, or the contemporary fictions of Louise Erdrich, who writes so poignantly about the generational effects of native conversion, to see how the “new world” discovered by native converts was not one of equality, equivalence, or acknowledgement. Speaking from the fraught position of “colonized *colonizer*” (Nelson, 1996: 60), Occom refigures the “broken and divided” Indian self as the broken promises of Christian evangelism, and gestures towards a revised dialogics of conversion in which the self he reveals in his autobiographical account, *Short Narrative*, for example, would not be regarded an othered self, but as a welcomed and complicating version of American selfhood.

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Unspeakable Fears: Politics and Style in the Enlightenment

Frank Shuffelton

I

There has not always been an Enlightenment in America. Judith Sargent Murray late in the eighteenth century congratulated herself and her readers for being alive in “an enlightened age,” but she did not consider herself to be participating in what had only lately come to have been called the “the Enlightenment” (Murray, 1992: 705). The term “Enlightenment” as a name for a movement or a period was both a late invention and a deeply suspect one by the time Murray was writing her “Gleaner” essays in the 1790s. Kant only published his famous essay “What Is Enlightenment” in 1784, and the term was not used as a name for an historical period or a movement a great deal earlier than that. Furthermore, by the end of the eighteenth century, men and women on both sides of the Atlantic were becoming dubious about the value of a movement of free-thinking rationalists. Her Federalist acquaintances saw the increasingly violent and threatening French Revolution as the logical result of the Enlightenment, and the orthodox ministers who attacked Thomas Paine’s free-thinking assault on religion, *The Age of Reason*, argued that Enlightenment was merely another name for atheism. For Murray to live in an “enlightened age” meant enjoying the neo-classical aesthetic values of the Augustans, the sociability of Shaftesbury and the Scottish common-sense philosophers, and the scientific and empirical world view ushered in by Locke and Newton. It did not mean the materialism and skepticism of Helvetius, Diderot, or Voltaire, and it certainly did not mean the radical social project of the French Revolution.

Subsequently, historians of early America consciously or unconsciously assumed that the Enlightenment was a European phenomenon, mostly French, and that an exceptional America was able to escape the shackles of feudalism without resorting to violence beyond a bit of heroic, easily romanticized conflict with the British during the Revolution. The general view was that American cultural, social, and political history simply worked itself out as a continuing improvement on its initial implicitly democratic, Protestant foundations. I. Woodbridge Riley’s account of early American philosophy discussed “deism” in preference to “the Enlightenment.” Vernon Parrington’s pioneering study of American culture tended to avoid the term “Enlightenment” in

favor of describing the effects of “English Independency and French Romantic Theory” (Parrington, 1927: x), and Perry Miller jumped from Edwards to Emerson with scarcely a glance at what came in between. Carl Becker followed his excellent work on the Lockean background of the Declaration of Independence with *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, a study of the Enlightenment that focused on French thinkers. In 1972 Henry May’s *The Enlightenment in America* finally recognized the existence of an American Enlightenment, although five years later Henry Steele Commager was still reluctant to allow for an American Enlightenment in its own terms in his book *The Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment*. By this time scholars were talking about national Enlightenments in the plural, and it was apparently possible to talk about an American Enlightenment that was uncontaminated by French atheism or revolutionary terror.¹ Yet the long silence about the Enlightenment in America reflected a problem buried at the heart of the Enlightenment itself.

By the time major historical studies were ready to address the American Enlightenment by name, the concept of the Enlightenment itself had become deeply suspect. Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno’s 1944 *Dialectic of Enlightenment* mounted an extended critique of the Western tradition of reason as an instrumental appropriation of nature, as a discourse of manipulation and dominance in opposition to Kant’s vision of a discourse of liberation. Commager’s celebration of the American Enlightenment seemed almost dated and jejune in the context of Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique. Henry Louis Gates’s charge that the eighteenth-century’s privileging of the written word as the sign of “the presence of a common humanity” embedded a dominating “racist discourse” in Western thought seems more in touch with modern critical perspectives (Gates, 1987: 14). Yet if enlightened reason could threaten to reduce the world to putative systems of observable facts and, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, “cover with its dominating network the inert, gray space of empiricity,” other Enlightenment discourses and programs were possible (Foucault, 1970: 341). Enlightened reason brought with it scientific and technical discoveries that significantly improved the material possibilities of human life, and it introduced that respect for individual men and women that Jürgen Habermas and others have described as the unfinished emancipatory project of the Enlightenment. Habermas’s theorizing of the Enlightenment as an ongoing project of freedom offers a powerful alternative to Horkheimer and Adorno’s theorizing of the Enlightenment as a system of domination, but neither view displaces or overcomes the other (Dubiel, 1992: 12). The Enlightenment did carry on simultaneous discourses of domination and emancipation, and a figure like Thomas Jefferson embodies each of them. The Jefferson who writes in *Notes on the State of Virginia* about the capacities of blacks is a poster boy for Gates’s analysis of racist discourse as a consequence of Enlightenment science, but the Jefferson of the Declaration of Independence or the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom is a major spokesperson in the Enlightenment discourse of emancipation.

Not only are there multiple national Enlightenments, then – an English Enlightenment, a French *éclaircissement*, a German *Aufklärung*, and so on – but within these various Enlightenments there are more moral projects than can be represented by its

historians in any single monolithic view of *the* Enlightenment. Peter Gay's assertion that "There were many philosophes in the eighteenth century, but there was only one Enlightenment" is perhaps more believable as philosophic arguing point than as historical fact (Gay, 1966: 3). Furthermore, as suggested by the example of Jefferson, enlighteners might easily confuse projects of domination and of emancipation, and enlightenment projects might easily have contradictory results unforeseen by its practitioners. Scientific medicine used the observation about the effectiveness of vaccination to begin the eventual elimination of smallpox, but scientific medicine in later years also lent itself to the therapeutic regime of domination analyzed by Foucault under the sign of the asylum. If post-1800 American historians chose until recently to be silent about the Enlightenment in America, it might not be irrelevant that the phenomenon of the Enlightenment had from its origins great silences and voids at the core of its being.

The various forms of these silences masked the self-contradictions of the Enlightenment project, its aporia, and they also submerged anxious possibilities that were for various reasons unspeakable. Behind the discourse of sociability that was central to the Enlightenment lurked the fear of violence and intellectual tyranny as well as the loneliness that came with placing an increasing value on personal autonomy. Behind the discourse of the value of individual human reason loomed worries about the disappearance or distancing of God and His providential care for the world. And in an age in which individuals were increasingly understood as motivated by interest came the recognition of irreconcilable interests motivating different members of society, interests such as slave-holding that some sought to place beyond discussion. During the political insecurities in the years after 1765, claiming the rights of Englishmen perhaps diverted many from the somewhat alarming possibility that they were not really "Englishmen" but were alone in the world. The aporia of Enlightenment were not necessarily obvious to the enlighteners, and their self-contradictory positions were in some ways a result of their own empiricism. Revisioning the world as a set of separate observable facts that had to be knit together within a network of reason encouraged the use of selective reasoning, different sorts of explanation for different facts. At the same time such reasoning at times became all too perilously obvious as an attempt to deal with a world of fragments, separated by geographical distance, time, culture, and memory. The silences of the Enlightenment concealed things that could not be spoken aloud, but they also covered the pieces of a fragmented world, indeed of fragmented selves. Recent scholars of Enlightenment culture have tended to emphasize its prizing of discourse and conversation, but the Enlightenment was equally notable for the things it chose to leave unsaid or could not find words for.

II

The English Enlightenment, the remarkable confluence of ideas and political innovations beginning with Bacon, Locke, Newton, had behind it the revolutionary and social violence of seventeenth-century England: civil war, the killing of a king, the

religious enthusiasm of unchurched radicals, and the eventual Glorious Revolution (Porter, 2001). The political culture that emerged in the years after 1689 embraced the Lockean fiction of a popular consensus as the legitimation of government, and this fiction was best maintained by controlling or diverting discussion of those topics that threatened to raise the passions that had proved so dangerous in the preceding century. This was all the more important as the post-1689 regime had to deal with unifying the disparate parts of the Stuart dominions, the separate realms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the rather haphazardly acquired and ruled assortment of colonies. The rule of law that was developed in the eighteenth century provided one avenue to make safe conversations about sovereignty and rights, but perhaps even more important was the code of sociability promoted by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury in a collection of tracts under the general title of *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. The effect of Shaftesbury's discourse of sociability was to rule off limits or to render harmless discussion of topics that could lead to the sort of violence of opinion that destroyed polities and societies.

Shaftesbury's first essay in *Characteristicks*, "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm," purports to support enthusiasm as natural to human beings, but in the closing pages he distinguishes it from divine inspiration, "a *real* feeling of the Divine Presence," by defining it as a false sensation of the same. At the time enthusiasm was most often used in connection to religious feeling, and it carried with it connotations of fanaticism, of the sort of religious extremism that had brought on civil war. Shaftesbury's readers would have understood the unstated subtext of his book: violence is everywhere ready to break out when men give way to violent passion. Shaftesbury praised the "noble ENTHUSIASM" that animated heroes, statesmen, poets, and orators, but he also linked it to "Delusion." Enthusiasm needed an antidote, and Shaftesbury found it in "GOOD HUMOUR," meaning both a spirit of tolerance toward others that grew out of our self-examination of our own possible "biassing Passion" and the "Freedom of Wit and Humour" that was the topic of his next essay, "Sensus Communis" (Shaftesbury, 2001: 34–5). For Shaftesbury the discovery of truth required a skeptical assessment of numerous opinions and previous claims to truth, a process best experienced in rational dialogue and conversation. Skepticism was naturally supported by a spirit of "raillery," and the search for truth was often best made behind a mask of irony and indirection. Thus, when certain gentlemen in Annapolis founded their Tuesday Club in 1745, they observed the Shaftesburean code with their seventh club law: "That if any Subject of what nature soever be discussed, which levels at party matters, or the administration of the Government of this province, or be disagreeable to the Club, no answer shall be Given thereto, but after Such discourse is ended, the Society Shall Laugh at the member offending, in order to divert the discourse" (Breslaw, 1988: 7–8). The rules of sociability and social exchange authorized silence and mockery as the preferred defense against violence of opinion. The discourse of reason was always haunted by a specter of madness and destruction.

Fears of violence and disintegration consequent upon civil war were not unique to the British Isles in the late seventeenth century. Virginia had its Bacon's rebellion,

and New York saw the resistance of Jacob Leisler. Massachusetts lost its charter, had a royal governor imposed upon it, and threw him into jail after learning about the arrival of William III in England. If colonial leaders did not have to seriously worry about Jacobite uprisings, they were frequently reminded of differences between the ruling centers and the backcountry, and they fretted about the popular unruliness of the lower classes, whether they were random tavern-goers in Massachusetts or more organized dissidents like Pennsylvania's Paxton Boys or the Carolina regulators. One solution, readily available in the nearly century-long conflict with the French and their Indian allies, projected the threat of violence outward and onto the "savage" or Catholic other beyond the frontier. Outside the civic community violence was conceivable; the greatest fear, the unspeakable fear, was directed toward the violence that might erupt within the civic community. Accordingly, the New England orthodox ministers used the occasion of Indian raids or military setbacks in conflicts with the French to contend that God was punishing the sins of the people. Pointing out the connection between an unspeakable or unspoken inner guilt and external threats allowed them to seem to confront an inner moral void even as they projected outward its consequent violence and terror. Jeremiads and other versions of demonization of the other were not so much attempts to deal with a sinful people as they were efforts to avoid recognition of the failure to reconstruct their own society.

Colonial authorities also attempted to suppress internal dissent by punishing scandalous or seditious speech, but the strategies of silence were as often turned against them. The master of the political rhetoric of silence during the American Enlightenment was Benjamin Franklin, and in fact he began his career as a political writer and social critic under the sign of "Silence Dogood." Franklin wrote the Dogood letters while serving an apprenticeship to his brother James, whom he found to be a harsh governor. Franklin footnotes a reference to his brother's beating him by drawing a political lesson. "I fancy his harsh & tyrannical Treatment of me, might be a means of impressing me with that Aversion to arbitrary Power that has stuck to me thro' my whole Life." James Franklin, however, unwittingly gave his apprentice an avenue to subvert their relationship when he began printing *The New England Courant*, Boston's second newspaper. The elder Franklin welcomed contributions from the "ingenious Men among his Friends, . . . But being still a Boy, & suspecting that my Brother would object to printing anything of mine in his Paper if he knew it to be mine, I contriv'd to disguise my Hand, & writing an anonymous Paper I put it in at Night under the Door of the Printing House" (Franklin, 1987: 1324, 1323). Franklin's use of anonymity was here motivated by his specific situation, and his anonymity enabled him to gain a secret mastery over his brother, who was unable to identify the author.

But Franklin's anonymity also masks different, unspeakable phenomena of the print world of the Enlightenment. James Franklin and his "Writing Friends" guessed that the author was one of the "Men of some Character among us for Learning and Ingenuity." They assumed that a participant in the print public sphere of Boston would be a gentleman of standing and some education; literacy was a sign of class as much as of rationality. Benjamin Franklin's assumption of a literary voice was an index of the

radically leveling, democratic implications of the republic of letters, particularly in an American milieu that had few real “gentlemen” in English terms. When Franklin and his friend James Ralph went to London, Ralph stayed and became a Grub Street hack; Franklin returned to Philadelphia and become one of the “Men of some Character.” Franklin’s democratic self-authorizing might well serve as an early example of Kant’s definition of enlightenment as man’s emergence from his self-imposed tutelage. Yet his self-creation ironically depended upon his putting himself to school to the rhetorical instruction of Addison and Steele, Shaftesbury and others. His self-production was also a reproduction of the models of Enlightenment discourse that simultaneously liberated him and imposed limits on him and on his development (Franklin, 1987: 1323).

When James Franklin offended the authorities with political criticism in the *Courant*, he was “taken up, censur’d and imprison’d for a Month by the Speaker’s Warrant” while Benjamin continued to print the paper. When James was released, he was ordered to “no longer print the Paper called the New England Courant.” He then contrived to release his younger brother from his apprenticeship and put the paper in his name, while at the same time drawing up new, secret indentures of apprenticeship that would require the younger Franklin to serve out his time. In his *Autobiography* Franklin remarks, “A very flimsy Scheme it was,” and “when under the Impressions of Resentment, for the Blows his Passion too often urg’d him to bestow on me,” he left his brother, defying him to produce the secret indentures.² Playing a public role as a free workman and a silent one as an indentured apprentice, Franklin’s strategies of secrecy and silence created a space of political and economic freedom. Being both free and bound was in effect being neither. Franklin had found a zero point, a moment when only his own will determined his status, that enabled him to escape the violence of his brother’s domination, the “arbitrary Power” that had twice provoked Revolution in the cultural memory of New England and would do so once again in Franklin’s lifetime.

Franklin’s Silence Dogood letters sketched out an ironic, skeptical strategy that Franklin would come back to again and again. Nothing is quite what it seems in these letters, including her own accounts of herself. Her account of her birth and first memory calls into question her narrative authority because of its unlikeliness, but it also makes the reader wonder what the untold story of her origins might be. She was born, she says, on the ship bringing her parents from London to New England, and she has a most surprising memory of the event. “My Entrance into this World was attended with the Death of my Father, a Misfortune, which tho’ I was not then capable of knowing, I shall never be able to forget; for as he, poor Man, stood upon the Deck rejoicing at my Birth, a merciless Wave entered the ship, and in one Moment carry’d him beyond Reprieve. This was the *first Day* which I saw, the *last* that was seen by my Father.” The garrulous author belies her name, and her letters mock both the ministerial culture that remained a hegemonic presence in Massachusetts even under the new charter as well as the popular culture that the ministers sought to reform. She describes herself as the widow of a minister, who had adopted her as a child and educated her

before proposing to her (after “several unsuccessful fruitless Attempts on the more topping Sort of our Sex”). She laughs at her “Master’s” awkward courtship, but then takes it seriously and marries him. In subsequent letters she retells a dream in which she visits the “Temple of LEARNING” in which blockheads are taught “how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a Room genteely.” She is later assured that this is “a lively Representation of HARVARD COLLEGE” (Franklin, 1987: 5, 7, 11–13). She hilariously sends up New England funeral elegies that were used to mark the deaths of men and women of standing in the community. Her defenses of women against misogyny were in their own way even more subversive of the patriarchalism that bolstered New England ruling classes.

Silence Dogood is not simply a satirical tool to mock ministerial authority, however. She also turns her attention to the “present reigning Vices of the Town” such as “Pride of Apparell,” drunkenness, and “hypocritical Pretenders to Religion.” Her condemning of the “Vices of the Town” is of a piece with a ministerial effort extending over several decades to reform the manners of New England.³ This campaign to set New England to rights, beginning with the Reforming Synod of 1679, was led by the Mathers – Silence Dogood’s last name is an obvious reference to Cotton Mather’s *Bonifacius, or, Essays to Do Good* – and if its success was doubtful, Franklin the reformer was sympathetic to its aims even if he was skeptical about its ideologues. The figure of Silence Dogood is herself both an object of amusement with her countrified, housewifely self-presentation, but at the same time the reader cannot help but respect her good sense, honest intentions, and candor. Or is it that we are supposed to suspect the campaign to eradicate vice from the town is the program of a set of elderly fussbudgets out of touch with the times? Whatever, Dogood in effect mirrors Franklin’s own epistemological zero point when he was both his brother’s apprentice and not his apprentice. Franklin’s reader is forced to think for herself about the meaning of Dogood as a social commentator because Franklin has withheld vital clues about how we are to understand her, and how we are to understand his position as the author.

Franklin’s writings frequently present seemingly reasonable speakers who similarly overturn easy trains of reasoning and force the reader into positions in which he is forced to balance contradictory truths. During the period when his brother was in jail, Franklin’s persona for the editor of the *Courant* was a duplicitous and secretive character who called himself “Janus” and claimed to “appear in the Town towards the Dusk of the Evening, to make Observations.” Janus, the double-faced Roman god, appropriately disguises an editor who has two faces, James Franklin’s and Benjamin’s, even as in a slightly more sinister sense it hints at the two-facedness of the younger Franklin who at the time was deceiving the authorities and ultimately his own brother. “Janus” claims that he is an even-handed lover of truth, but he is more clearly a manipulative rhetorical invention whose every word covers silences of intention. “I converse with all sorts of Person’s and know how to adapt my Discourse to the Company I am in, be it Serious, Comical, or anything else; for I can screw my self into as many Shapes as there are different Opinions amongst Men.”⁴ Janus was simultaneously everyman and no man, a mask from behind which Franklin could attack “arbitrary power” while refusing

to disclose his own motives. Janus and Silence Dogood could attack the formation of ideology at Harvard or from the pulpit even as they masked their own attempts to manipulate opinion and form counter-ideological positions.

Similarly ironic figures include Polly Baker, who successfully defended herself against a charge of bastardy by arguing that her illegitimate children increased the wealth of the community and that she only obeyed “the first and great Command of Nature, and of Nature’s God, *Increase and multiply*” (Franklin, 1987: 308). Her argument in support of extra-marital sex ironically persuaded one of her judges to marry her the next day. Poor Richard himself, Franklin’s most popular and enduring ironic invention, ended his career with a preface to the 1758 version of *Poor Richard Improved* that mocked his own wisdom. In this chapter, frequently reprinted as “The Way to Wealth,” Richard describes coming upon a crowd of people waiting for an auction to begin. A “plain clean old Man” named Father Abraham begins to address them by repeating page after page of the aphorisms of Poor Richard with an emphasis on those about self-control, austerity, and economy. This turns out to be an overwhelming dose of pithy truths for any reader forced to consume the whole at once, and initial amusement changes to skepticism about the practicality of good advice delivered in the manner of Father Abraham and finally annoyance at the whole pack of Poor Richard’s truths. When Father Abraham ceases talking, the doors to the auction house open, and the crowd, moments before in agreement with the advice to save their pennies, pours in “to buy extravagantly” (Franklin, 1987: 1295, 1302). Poor Richard is disheartened by this, although his “Vanity was wonderfully delighted” with Father Abraham’s performance, and the reader is left to decide where the author stands in regard to his own language.

Silence Dogood, Polly Baker, and Father Abraham point to Franklin’s own techniques of political manipulation and control that depend not upon the reason of others but upon their fundamental irrationalities, their vanity, greed, or appetite, passions that he himself is not immune to. In the *Autobiography* he describes how his love of contradicting others enabled him to win arguments but irritated his acquaintances. His “disputacious Turn,” he said, was “apt to become a very bad Habit, making People often extremely disagreeable in Company, by the Contradiction that is necessary to bring it into Practice, & thence, besides souring and spoiling the Conversation, is productive of Disgusts & perhaps Enmities where you have occasion for friendship” (Franklin, 1987: 1318). Rather than provoke passions that could lead to violence, Franklin describes strategies for manipulating other individuals as well as a larger public opinion. He comments, “I took care not only to be in *Reality* Industrious & frugal, but to avoid all *Appearances* of the Contrary.” He himself carried his fresh supplies of paper in a wheelbarrow so that everyone could observe his industriousness, and he occasionally entertained himself by reading in the evenings behind drawn blinds in his shop so that his neighbors would see the light within and think he was working. He taught himself to defer arguments and to qualify “dogmatical Expression” and thus gained “so much Weight with my Fellow Citizens, when I proposed new Institutions, or Alterations in the Old; and so much Influence in public Councils when I

became a Member.” The Junto, the club for mutual self-improvement, Franklin and young workmen friends established, “had from the Beginning made it a Rule to keep our Institution a Secret,” and he proposed that instead of adding new members to the original twelve, “every Member separately should endeavour to form a subordinate Club, with the same Rules . . . and without informing them of the Connexion with the Junto” (Franklin, 1987: 1369, 1393, 1402). Franklin’s strategic silences thus variously enabled him to shape and manipulate the civic and political life of Philadelphia by putting his desires into play in the minds of others even as he encouraged them to think of themselves as autonomous individuals. His maneuverings are in the interest of avoiding civic discord, but at the same time they characteristically are silent about the passionate motivations of men. They pretend that others are as selfless, virtuous, and public-minded as Franklin himself pretends to be. The fiction of reasoning citizens becomes a way to occult the irrational impulses that underlie outbursts of civic violence.

The plan for a series of clubs independent of the Junto but secretly controlled by the Junto’s principles and by members of the Junto conjures up an image of Franklin acting like a great benevolent spider casting his web over the community in the interests of peace and progress. The Junto was no Politburo, however, nor was Franklin a dictator in waiting, because his ironic strategies of questioning and his Janus-faced ability to entertain different perspectives simultaneously allowed him to interrogate the Enlightenment’s central fiction about itself, its faith in reason. Reflecting upon his conclusions in his youthful pamphlet, *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure, and Pain*, he allowed that “this Doctrine tho’ it might be true, was not very useful.” He turned reason against itself in order to reveal its limitations when he described a shipboard incident in Long Island Sound. People on the ship began catching cod, which went immediately into the frying pan. Although Franklin was at the time a vegetarian on principle, he remembered that he “had formerly been a great Lover of Fish & when this came hot out of the Frying Pan, it smelt admirably well.” Balanced “between Principle & Inclination,” reason lost out when Franklin noticed that some of the fish had smaller ones in their stomachs. “Then, thought I, if you eat one another, I don’t see why we mayn’t eat you. So I din’d upon Cod very heartily and continued to eat with other People. . . . So convenient a thing it is to be a *reasonable Creature*, since it enables one to find or make a Reason for every thing one has a mind to do” (Franklin, 1987: 1319, 1339). Reason is a malleable, and suspect, agency for Franklin; recognition of its limits when raised to the level of “principle” brings him into the equality of the human community and prevents him from using it as an instrument of exclusion. Nevertheless, freedom to reason, as Franklin recognized, ultimately demands that we question even ourselves as reasoners, all the while retaining the value of reason as the sign of our freedom.

Self-questioning and flexibility, grounded in his ironic regard for reason, became central themes in Franklin’s politics. In the 1760s while serving in London as the agent of the Pennsylvania legislature, he supported the British ministry in order to oppose the interests of the Penn family proprietors, even supporting the Stamp Act so

far as to look into gaining the potentially profitable distributorships for his friends. When colonial opposition to the Stamp Act made it clear that it would be regarded as an act of “arbitrary power” on the part of the ministry, Franklin reinvented himself as an American patriot and not an empire loyalist like his associate Joseph Galloway. As a diplomat, he raised Shaftesburian principles of sociability from the parlor to the discourse of nations, recognizing that America needed not only economic and political support from the international community but its friendship as well. When John Adams, who focused more narrowly on questions of national interest, arrived in Paris to join Franklin, he was continually exasperated by his senior colleague’s inclination to socialize with the French and to deal with officialdom with persuasion rather than principled argument. At the conclusion of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 Franklin delivered a remarkable speech urging skepticism and compromise as the spirit in which the Constitution might be made to work. Stating his position at the outset – “I confess, that I do not entirely approve of this Constitution at present” – he immediately qualified himself, “but, Sir, I am not sure I shall never approve it; for, having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged, by better information or fuller consideration, to change my opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found it to be otherwise. It is therefore that, the older I grow, the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment of others.” (“Old Father Janus” would have approved that double negative, “not . . . never.”) At the conclusion he requested “that every member of the Convention who may still have objection to it, would with me on this occasion doubt a little of his own infallibility, and to make *manifest our unanimity*, put his name to this Instrument” (Franklin, 1987: 1139, 1141). Franklin’s editor, Barbara Oberg, has called this speech “the culmination of Franklin’s life as a propagandist, persuader, and cajoler of people.” She rightly understands the value of Franklin’s turn away from the temptations of a discourse of Enlightenment dominance, his rejection of the temptations that Robespierre and Napoleon would soon succumb to. “A stand for compromise is not the stuff of heroism, virtue, or moral certainty,” she writes, “But it is the essence of the democratic process” (Oberg, 1993: 176, 189).

Oberg is certainly right in her observation, but an appeal to the “democratic process” as a defense for Franklin’s principled irony substitutes an abstract principle, a reified bit of conventional Enlightenment language, for the unspoken, unspeakable possibility that Franklin’s language defers. If the Constitutional Convention was nominally called to address the defects of the Articles of Confederation, its unspoken motive was to forestall the civic, revolutionary violence that had been foreshadowed by Shays’s Rebellion. When that Convention met, one of its first acts was to impose rules of silence upon itself. The delegates agreed “That nothing spoken in the House be printed or otherwise published or communicated without leave,” although they did not agree with Rufus King’s proposal not to record the evidence of votes because “changes of opinion would be frequent in the course of the business & would fill the minutes with contradictions” (Madison, 1985: 28, 25). Franklin’s strategies of silence, his call for a manifest unanimity to be displayed not because of certainty but because of

shared doubt, masked the fears of contradiction, of opposition, or revolt and violence in the civic community. Above all, democracy and the “democratic process” are not the same as freedom and the discourse of emancipation. Franklin’s silences where all things were still possible preserved the possibility of rejection and revolt and implicitly rejected the Enlightenment discourse of domination critiqued by Horkheimer and Adorno.

III

Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* was also haunted by fears of revolutionary chaos and reluctance to confront the possibility that violence might be rooted in American nature itself and not in the defects of culture or politics. Although he admits that “we are machines fashioned by every circumstance around us,” he suggests that in the rich soil of the new world and with the just laws of Pennsylvania, only sloth can prevent a person from finding wealth and happiness (Crèvecoeur, 1981: 98). Crèvecoeur’s pastoral romances about happy farmers, industrious bees, grateful immigrants, and genial Indians who come calling fail to align with his apostrophes to benevolent nature. He might ask rhetorically, “Precious soil, I say to myself, by what singular custom of law is it that thou was made to constitute the riches of the freeholder?” (1981: 54). But no answer emerges that can include the ominous sign of the kingbird that devours his bees or the rattlesnake that can charm the birds to their death. Neither can its tales of friendly Indians erase traditional cultural discourse that points in other directions – there are reasons, after all, why Andrew the Hebridean is alarmed when Indians invade his kitchen – nor assign responsibility for the evils of slavery. (“My Negroes are tolerably faithful and healthy,” he writes – 1981: 53). When revolutionary violence breaks into his account in the final letter, “Distresses of a Frontier Man,” readers charmed by Farmer James’s rosy account of life as an American Farmer might first be shocked and surprised, but then they might realize that violence and terror had been a central feature of the author’s “Precious soil” all along even if he refused to see it as such.

Letters from an American Farmer exposes more than the Enlightenment fear of civic violence, however; it is haunted by anxiety about isolation and loneliness that is everywhere in the Enlightenment and that in America has its own peculiar modes. As many people of the Enlightenment saw it, Newtonian science had moved God to the margins of the universe, leaving humans to their own reason, and Lockean epistemology had reconfigured the mind as a theater of sense impressions that Berkeley and Hume in different ways would sever from any necessary connection to the material world. As Hume would put it, “what we call a *mind*, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos’d tho’ falsely, to be endow’d with a perfect simplicity and identity.”⁵ A mind that was merely a heap of perceptions could know only perceptions of other men and women, not the individuals themselves; such a mind was accordingly trapped in its own perceptions, isolated from

others. The “certain relations” that united separate perceptions of the external world would necessarily be desperate fabrications, a network of reasoning that could hold together a fragmented world and a fragmented self. Shaftesburian notions of sociability and consequent theories of sentimentality developed by Frances Hutcheson, Lord Kames, and Adam Smith attempted to create such useful fictions that would enable society. But these relations operate in secret and in silence, as sympathy and as written language. As Crèvecoeur informs the Abbé Raynal in his dedication, “There is no doubt, a secret communion among good men throughout the world, a mental affinity connecting them by a similitude of sentiments: then, why, though an American, should not I be permitted to share in that extensive intellectual consanguinity?” (Crèvecoeur, 1981: 38) Farmer James accordingly writes his letters in order to establish a relation with a distant, almost unimaginable English correspondent whose motives are a mystery to him and to his Quaker wife, and this literary masquerade becomes in turn a means for Crèvecoeur, long exiled from Europe, to reinsert himself into the communion of Enlightened people.

Material conditions of American life colored the Enlightenment concern with isolation and fragmentation of experience. The spatial distance from Europe was also a chronological distance. If the King died or a great battle was won, Americans would not learn of it for many weeks after the news had spread in Europe, and individual colonies, even settlements within particular colonies, were sometimes only slightly less distant from their governing centers. In Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, people as frequently longed for more concrete news about happenings in the backcountry as they did for news from Europe or the Caribbean. At the same time, the news that arrived was often partial and fragmentary, and it was often difficult to organize into a coherent, rational pattern. American scientific discourse of the period, an important medium for fabricating “certain relations” among facts as well as between fellow members of the international scientific community, was also marked by the tendency to report on individual facts, on local phenomena which European scientists would have to fit into a larger pattern. Thus Crèvecoeur offers not a coherent theory of America that can explain the new political entity that has emerged on the Atlantic margin, but instead sends 12 discrete letters, each a separate essay that does not always have a readily apparent logical or narrative relationship to the others. Crèvecoeur’s fragments, on the one hand a sign of his modernity, also attest to his loneliness in the world as much as he might try to deny it with his sentimental fictions.

Crèvecoeur was hardly alone in fabricating relations among himself and distant others or between the disparate pieces of the world he inhabited. Franklin cast his nets over Philadelphia and subsequently reached out more ambitiously to plan intercolonial networks of “intellectual consanguinity” and political cooperation. He took a leading role in the 1740s toward the creation of the American Philosophical Society as a site where the scientific intelligences of the colonies could exchange information and report observations on local phenomena. In 1754 he promoted the Albany Plan of Union, which was largely of his own devising, and he set the scene for it by publishing in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of May 9 an editorial that was accompanied by America’s

first editorial cartoon. The famous image of the snake in pieces, with each piece labeled as a colony, and the whole captioned "Join, or Die," visibly represented the political problems of the isolated colonies as well as a key epistemological problem of the Enlightenment itself, the fragility of any "certain relations" that might be constructed to dispersed communities. The reality was the individual colony alert to its own interest and civic life, but their survival as individual entities paradoxically depended upon their ability to enter into a union. Franklin's Albany Plan responded with America's first federal plan of organization, which allowed for each colony to retain its constitution and identity while at the same time placing itself under "one General Government" (Franklin, 1987: 378). Franklin's plan was rejected by the colonies for ceding too much power to royal government and by the British ministry for being too democratic, but its conception of federalism became the basic political conception which the revolutionary generation used to construct a state made out of states.

Franklin's Albany Plan may have failed because the individual colonies were not yet ready for it, but it did not help that it was presented as essentially a bureaucratic rationalization; Franklin's "Reasons and Motives for the Albany Plan of Union" emphasized over and over again its "convenience" and its "efficiency" as a means to repel an external enemy. Later appeals for national unity in 1776 were designed to reject an internal enemy, one that raised the specter of civic discord; Americans who until very recently had been thinking of themselves as English and claiming the rights of Englishmen were suddenly in revolt against England, against an internalized part of their own identity. Successful appeals for national unity needed to offer both a rationale for the fragmented colonies and a politically divided citizenry to come together, but they needed also to appeal to the Shaftesburian language of sociability and sentiment. Thus Thomas Paine's crucially important pamphlet *Common Sense* echoed the title of Shaftesbury's "Sensus Communis: an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour" as well as the key intellectual faculty so denominated by the Scottish philosophers. Paine had been in America little more than a year when *Common Sense* appeared, and before that and after his life was rootless and lived in a sort of virtual exile. His call for American unity, then, was based on his life experience of loss and leaving, and when he warned that "the least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound will enlarge with the tree, and posterity read it in full grown characters," he recast the fiction of community as a natural process and not merely a bureaucratic good idea. "Now is the seedtime of continental union, faith, and honor," he said, and his metaphor suggested that these abstractions had the solidity of biological fact (Paine, 1995: 21).

Paine in *Common Sense* recognized that fracture, the opening of a void between one person or society and another, could create either a moment of freedom or an abyss that would destroy the union of a people. Existential isolation and loneliness were badges of both independence and solipsism, but Paine will suggest his own strategy of silence, different from Franklin's irony, that can turn isolation into strength. Contending that "the distance at which the Almighty hath placed England and America, is a strong and natural proof, that the authority of the one, over the other, was never the design

of Heaven," Paine urged that "a new era for politics is struck; a new method of thinking hath arisen." The rupture with England is seconded by "the blood of the slain, the weeping voice of nature," and it empowers people to assert their independence and ability to govern themselves (Paine, 1995: 25, 21). But if fracture is empowering when rejecting an external threat, it is an alarming phenomenon when it is internal. "The Continental Belt is too loosely buckled," says Paine. It is "Held together by an unexampled concurrence of sentiment, which is nevertheless subject to change, and which every secret enemy is endeavouring to dissolve. . . . The mind of the multitude is left at random, and seeing no fixed object before them, they pursue such as fancy or opinion starts. Nothing is criminal; there is no such thing as treason; wherefore, every one thinks himself at liberty to act as he pleases." Nevertheless, "Independence is the only BOND that can tie and keep us together. We shall then see our object, and our ears will be legally shut against the schemes of an intriguing, as well, as a cruel enemy." Because independence as Paine portrays it is natural, he locates the sentiment of independence at the core of the "mental affinity" (to use Crèvecoeur's term) that creates the national union. The unseen abstractions of "continental union, faith and honour" will become real, and secrecy, silence, and distance will be assigned to the British other and to the past. Says Paine in conclusion, "instead of gazing at each other with suspicious or doubtful curiosity, let each of us, hold out to his neighbour the hearty hand of friendship, and unite in drawing a line, which like an act of oblivion shall bury in forgetfulness every former dissention" (Paine, 1995: 51, 50, 53, 54). Paine here offers his own version of Franklin's federalism; each citizen operates as an individual agent in extending the hand of friendship that unites the whole citizenry, and the distancing gaze is replaced by forgetfulness.

Thomas Jefferson and his colleagues similarly grounded the Declaration of Independence on a sentimental argument, both in its opening statements about equality and rights as well as in the signers' final pledging to each other their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. The Declaration simultaneously signaled a rupture, an irrevocable distance, that had opened between the United States and Great Britain and a desire to bridge over gaps and distances among the various states and between the United States and the world at large, recognized in the "decent respect for the opinions of mankind." In the latter sense David Armitage argues that the Declaration should be read in the context of international law and points out that its significance is as an offer of the United States willingly to participate "in an international system created by common norms, customs, and agreements."⁶ In the first sense of the Declaration as a text that attempted to construct the grounds for a national union, representatives of the 13 colonies recognized themselves as citizens of the same nation and in the process of debating and agreeing on the Declaration performed a crucial act of nation-making. But if debate hammered out a consensus about the text and the nation, it also uncovered topics that could not be talked about, most notably the deleted passage on slavery. A document to which individuals put their hands was also a document of silence and forgetting, and a document that asserted a union of individual men and women silently left out most of those men and women. This unresolved silence at the heart of

the Declaration might be the source of its power, however, as the tension between the assertion that all men are created equal and the silence about the rights of those “men” who are actually women or who are black make it a continuously relevant document.

Jefferson’s most ambitious engagement with what Hume might call a “heap or collection of different perceptions” was in his one book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In responding to a set of questions posed by a French diplomatic official, he assembled a collage of discrete commentaries on the diverse facts that constituted Virginia at a moment when he had experienced the most devastating loss of his life. Of all of the early presidents Jefferson most prized sociability as both a means toward establishing political consensus and as an end in itself, but in many ways, particularly with women, he was socially ill at ease. He was anxious for friendship – he sent over the years numerous invitations to those with whom he felt a “mental affinity” to remove to the neighborhood of Monticello – yet at the same time he found it difficult to open himself fully to others in intimate relationships. Early romantic flirtations came to nothing, but his marriage to Martha Wayles Skelton allowed him to experience the most intense emotional connection of his life to another person. When she died in 1782, Jefferson was devastated; he secluded himself at Monticello and apparently burned all of the letters to and from his wife. Working out of his grief and loneliness, Jefferson continued writing the *Notes*. If his stated aim was in the grand Enlightenment tradition, his silent unspoken purpose was to work through the new vacancy in his life. He sent out letters to friends and acquaintances who could supply necessary information, inviting them in effect to share in his project, but his letters that invited involvement or confidences also held his correspondents at a distance. (When he sent out the first printed copies to his friends and fellow intellectuals, he included in the copies an inscription that enjoined them not to let the book out of their hands, enforcing silence even as he offered a token of esteem.) The text he produced was curiously marked by its interest in caverns, excavations, and gaps, particularly in its passages of geographic or geological description but also in the very form of the book.⁷ In describing Virginia’s natural features, its people, laws, and institutions, Jefferson exposed the gaps between the discourses appropriate to these topics by refusing to consider them as a unified whole. His title was the plural *Notes* and not a singular history or account of a unified Virginia. Jefferson’s collection of brilliant fragments was part of a fundamentally skeptical approach toward truth that Franklin would have appreciated, but it also reflected the fragments, the heaps of perceptions, ultimately the silences, the emotions that could not be talked about, that constituted Jefferson’s inner experience.

Jefferson had larger, federalizing plans for his text than celebrating his own particular state. By using the text of *Notes on the State of Virginia* to rebut European aspersions on American climate and biological possibility, Virginia became a synecdoche for all of America, and its particularity would, he hoped, reveal the general truth of a generous American nature and an enlightened politics. Paine had earlier claimed in *The Crisis* that the American cause was not the affair of a mere locality, even of a kingdom, but of a continent (1995: 21), and Jefferson embraced a similar rhetoric when thinking about an empire for liberty that began with Virginia and extended outward. “We are acting

for all mankind," he told Joseph Priestley in a letter of June 19, 1802 (Jefferson, 1903: X, 324). This would be, like Paine's imagination of "the Continent," a natural growth rooted in biological imperatives and sentimental bonds between citizens. Jefferson also shared with Franklin a confidence that federal principles could maintain a union of individual citizens and separate states, but he was much more willing to recognize that difference, fracture, might be the natural condition of the world and of human societies. The strength of the union lay in the strength of individual citizens, and the very purpose of government was to protect the particular rights and liberty of individuals. In an 1802 letter to Priestley he claimed that "Our people in a body are wise, because they are under the unrestrained and unperverted operation of their own understanding." In support of this unrestrained operation of reason he championed the right of revolution, of free and unrestrained emigration, of civic violence when the hand of authority became oppressive, and even, as in the Kentucky Resolutions, the right of states to reject the national constitutional consensus. The disparate parts of the nation would be held together by the uniform action of individuals using their unrestrained reason, creating a version of what Andrew Burstein has called "sentimental democracy" (Jefferson, 1903: X, 324, Burstein, 1999). *Notes on the State of Virginia* relied upon the reader's unrestrained reason to create a coherent sense out of its fragments, simultaneously enacting the thinking American subject it extolled in its pages, whether as Logan, George Washington or David Rittenhouse. Readers reading silently in their own homes would recreate in imagination their own private Monticellos not by agreeing with Jefferson's opinions but by engaging in the same process of critical reasoning as his, albeit they were led to different conclusions. Nowhere for Jefferson is the nation more present than in the imagination of a solitary reader, because ultimately for him the nation was a text that expressed the common sense of individual hearts.

Jefferson's attempt in *Notes* to cast a network of reason that theorized disruption, revolution, and critique over the diversity of American experience and American perceptions collided with a central problem of the Enlightenment, the ability of minds defined as ultimately self-contained within the theater of their own perceptions to comprehend the inner life of others. The most notorious passages of this book, even in Jefferson's own time, have been the discussions of the mental and physical abilities of blacks in which Jefferson concludes that they are deficient in reasoning abilities. He qualifies this conclusion with skeptical gestures, but they do little to overcome the fact that Jefferson like most of his contemporaries seems only able to imagine others as either versions of himself or as useful fictions. In terms similar to Adam Smith's recommendations in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Jefferson advised his grandson that when "Under temptations and difficulties, I could ask myself what would Dr. Small, Mr. Wythe, Peyton Randolph do in this situation? What course in it will assure me their approbation?" (Jefferson, 1903: XII, 197). This technique of moral formation, apparently intersubjective and social in its intent, ultimately relied on not the presence of the real George Wythe as a moral guide but a fictionalized and internalized specter who was merely Jefferson's idea of Wythe. When Jefferson imagined his fellow citizens, he thought of them as reasoning subjects, very much as he thought of himself. So

sure was he of the uniformity of unrestrained reasoning that in 1822 he assured one of his correspondents, "I confidently expect that the present generation will see Unitarianism become the general religion of the United States." He seriously overestimated the popularity of Unitarianism, but in ascribing a uniform mental process to others he was not that far from Crèvecoeur's notion of the mental affinities of the enlightened, Paine's call for patriotic friendship, or even John Jay's assertion in *The Federalist* that Americans are "a band of brethren."⁸ When Jefferson came to imagine a possible role that blacks might play as citizens of his Virginia he was unable to conceive of them as like himself and was thus unable to conceive of them as citizens. Jefferson could only imagine a national union held together by reasoning subjects who were also held by the affectionate bonds of sociability as one composed of individuals who were fundamentally the same. When it came down to a question of political participation, women joined blacks as too removed from Jefferson's white patriarchal vision of the civic community, and if some of his friends, David Ramsay for one, chided him for being too severe on blacks, none of them seem to have spoken up for women.

For all of Jefferson's failure to theorize the place in a democratic society of individuals who were inconceivably different from himself, his more powerful and basic insight was the equality of all individuals. The distance between this expression in the Declaration of Independence and the practice of Jefferson and his contemporaries, indeed the distance between this claim and the practices of their successors to the present day, energized resentment, anger, and critique among those who were excluded from the Republic. Many of them, including David Walker and the women of the Seneca Falls Convention, used the language of the Declaration to assert their claims to participate in the Enlightenment's discourse of emancipation. Judith Sargent Murray, who was suspicious of "Enlightenment," proclaimed in an essay "Observations on Female Abilities," "The idea of the incapability of women, is, we conceive, in this enlightened age, totally inadmissible, and we have concluded that establishing the expedience of admitting them to share the blessings of equality, will remove every impediment to their advancement" (Murray, 1992: 705).

Murray's essay appeared in a project that is perhaps the last great literary expression of the American Enlightenment, another collection of brilliant fragments in an essay collection entitled *The Gleaner*. This anatomy included a novel, a play, critical essays, political and social critique, which had mostly appeared in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, where Murray masqueraded as "Mr. Gleaner." Operating out of silence and secrecy, she introduced a cast of imaginary letter writers who, as Nina Baym has pointed out, come "from every walk of society, who employ a range of dictions and a variety of vernaculars" in a "labyrinthine" texture of discourses ("Introduction" to Murray, 1992: xiii). Murray is better able to present the possibility of the social investment of subjects that Jefferson, as well as Paine and Crèvecoeur, could not fully imagine. Not least among the ironies of the American Enlightenment's discourse is its early appearance in a series of essays written by Benjamin Franklin masquerading as a woman and its late manifestation in pieces written by a woman masquerading as a man. The strategies of disguise, silence, and secrecy open a space of freedom for each writer, but they

also defer interpretation and manipulate readerly expectations in order to control the possibilities of contradiction and conflict, violence and loneliness, the unspeakable subjects of the Enlightenment.

NOTES

- 1 On a plurality of nationalist Enlightenments, see the essays collected in Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in International Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- 2 Franklin, 1987: 1324–5. For James Franklin's difficulties with the authorities and Benjamin's editorial masquerade, see Jeffrey A. Smith, *Printers and Press Freedom: The Ideology of Early American Journalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 100–6.
- 3 Franklin, 1987: 17, 26. On the reformation of manners, see Richard P. Gildrie, *The Profane, the Civil, and The Godly: The Reformation of Manners in Orthodox New England, 1679–1749* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
- 4 Franklin, *New England Courant* (June 18, 1722); quoted in Smith, 1988: p. 101.
- 5 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 137. On Hume, fragmentation, and Enlightenment fears, see Susan Manning, *Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
- 6 Armitage, 2002. The classic argument for the Declaration as a sentimental argument is still Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978). But see also Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language and the Culture of performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).
- 7 See Douglas Anderson, "Subterranean Virginia: The Ethical Poetics of Thomas Jefferson," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33: pp. 233–49, 2000.
- 8 Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Second Series: Jefferson's Extracts from the Gospels*, ed. Dickinson W. Adams (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 409; Jay, "Federalist No. 2," in *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 9.

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Slave Narrative and Captivity Narrative: American Genres

Gordon M. Sayre

The Indian captivity narrative and the fugitive slave narrative both arose out of the violent facts of life in colonial and antebellum North America. Beginning with Mary Rowlandson's landmark publication of 1682 about her 11-week captivity during King Philip's War in New England, prisoners taken by Native Americans in frontier wars wrote or dictated hundreds of popular narratives about their experiences, for audiences that were at once repelled and fascinated by American Indian peoples. The genre became extremely popular during the Seven Years War and the American Revolution, when it dovetailed with wartime propaganda, and continued to produce new narratives throughout the nineteenth century. Published narratives of African-American slaves began to appear in the late 1700s and reached their apogee during the fierce political conflicts over abolition and slavery leading up to the Civil War. Frederick Douglass's first narrative of 1845 has come to epitomize the form, but earlier slave narratives often placed a greater emphasis on religious over political appeals, and those by women also addressed their audience differently.

Due to their wide readership, strong sentimental appeals, and acute political relevance, both of these genres of non-fiction have made essential contributions to canonical American literature, from novels to poetry, written by authors from across the racial and class spectrum, and they continue to inspire new works of fiction even as the twenty-first century begins. Whether either genre truly is a unique and indigenous creation of Anglo-American and Afro-Anglo-American writers is a matter for specialist literary historians to debate, but none would deny their profound influence. Moreover, as critics including Richard Slotkin and Annette Kolodny have remarked (without, however, pursuing the topic at any length) the rise of the slave narrative in the early nineteenth century was strongly influenced by the many popular captivity narratives in circulation at that time and earlier. The two genres both produced powerful scenes of suffering at the hands of unjust and unfeeling captors. These lines from Henry Bibb's slave narrative could easily have come from a narrative of Indian captivity (and in fact Bibb was for a time held by Indians in Oklahoma, who he says were his kindest masters):

Complaints, when not answered with blows, would go unheeded: I have also been compelled early in life, to go at the bidding of a tyrant, through all kinds of weather, hot or cold, wet or dry, and without shoes frequently, until the month of December, with my bare feet on the cold frosty ground, cracked open and bleeding as I walked.

(Zafar, 1997: 71)

This chapter will examine the grounds for that influence, survey the two genres, and identify their common sources in religious and popular writings of the Atlantic World in the eighteenth century and earlier.

To consider the literary history of these two genres alongside one another may come as a surprise, for there are of course fundamental differences in the relationship that each establishes between its narrator, his or her captors or slaveholders, and the implied reader or audience. For the captive, the archetypal narrative climaxes with an escape or redemption that returns her or him to home, to the culture and often the family of her or his origin. For the slave, of course, an escape to the North, to Canada, or to England does not achieve a fully happy ending, but entails risks and challenges anew, and the narrator's family members often remained behind in slavery. The captive writes for a like-minded audience of those who share her or his sense of home. The slave, on the other hand, addresses a predominantly white audience that, even if sympathetic to the plight of the slave and the imperative of abolition, generally held racist attitudes about African-Americans and their abilities and roles in the larger society. As Rafia Zafar has written in one of the few published comparisons of the two genres, "unlike their immediate literary models [the Indian captives], African Americans who wrote of their captivity shared 'nonwhite' status with the captors of their authorial predecessors" (1997: 42). Many slave narratives therefore faced the difficult rhetorical challenge of establishing an ethical common ground upon which a slave might establish his or her humanity in the eyes of readers.

One common tactic was the representation of grief and outrage at the suffering and death of the narrator's family. In Mary Rowlandson's traumatic opening scene, unnamed parents witness their child being "knock'd on the head" (Salisbury, 1997: 31) and killed. Mary then sees the same cruel death inflicted on her nephew, and later tells of her own daughter dying in her arms from exposure to the New England winter. Likewise, slave narratives are replete with such testimony of family bonds broken asunder by the torture, death or sale of family members. Particularly in the nineteenth-century era of the "cult of domesticity," when the nuclear family and its home were extolled as the locus of moral value, African-Americans demanded that the same treatment be accorded to their families. Thus Sojourner Truth implores "all who would fain believe that slave parents have not natural affection for their offspring" to witness a scene of her parents, who "would sit for hours, recalling and recounting every endearing, as well as harrowing circumstance that taxed memory could supply, from the histories of those dear departed ones, of whom they had been robbed, and for whom their hearts still bled" (11).

This basic strategy of sentimentality sought to move the reader to an emotional response, typically tears of sorrow, through the explicit representation of a scene

of suffering witnessed by the protagonist. The protagonist's emotions, in this case Sojourner Truth's sympathy for her parents, models the response that she seeks to provoke from her reader. Another paradigmatic scene comes from Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Jacobs fled from her slaveowner but was unable to escape her hometown of Edenton, North Carolina, so she hid for seven years in the attic of her free aunt's house, secreted from all but a couple of trusted relations. "One day the screams of a child nerved me with strength to crawl to my peeping-hole, and I saw my son covered with blood. A fierce dog, usually kept chained, had seized and bitten him" (Yellin, 1987: 123). Harriet can do nothing to help her son, for he does not know she is there, and she cannot reveal her presence. Likewise the reader can take no immediate action to help Harriet. The tears of sympathy a reader sheds on her behalf recapitulate those that Harriet sheds for her son. The scene of the dog attacking her son follows closely one written by Bernard Mandeville in *An Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* (1723), which he actually used to argue that "Pity is often by our selves and in our own cases mistaken for Charity" and that both are ultimately motivated by vanity or self-love. Some modern critics including Karen Sanchez-Eppler have argued that the abolition movement was driven as much by white women's bid for their own influence as by a genuine concern for enslaved black women.

This structural paradigm for sentimentality helps clarify critical debates which have occupied scholars of American literature at least since the publication of Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* in 1977. Critics like Douglas who are hostile toward sentimentalism accuse its practitioners of inspiring crocodile tears from effeminate readers who make no effort to help those whose suffering caused them to weep. Defenders of sentimental writers, notably Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs* (1985), insisted that Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and other sentimental novels had real political power, and that if these authors' tools were women and tears, this was simply because nineteenth-century morality enshrined women as the guardians of morality, and the ongoing cult of sensibility prized tears as the *sine qua non* of emotional sincerity. Tompkins and others generally use nineteenth-century novels as their primary texts, but the slave narratives and captivity narratives are just as topical, for these were true stories of suffering, and often laid out explicit programs of action for their readers. Douglass's slave narrative was promoted by William Lloyd Garrison to recruit for the abolition movement. Mary Rowlandson admonished her readers at the end of her text as her minister husband might: "The Lord hath shewed me the vanity of these outward things . . . we must rely on God himself, and our whole dependence must be upon him" (Salisbury, 1997: 65). The solemnity of these appeals dignifies all the sensational violence that the two texts contain, but later texts in both genres sometimes resorted to lurid sensationalism, scenes where the whipping of the pretty mulatto, or the torture of the female captive, seems designed merely for the salacious indulgence of the (male) reader. Roy Harvey Pearce, in his landmark 1947 essay on the captivity narrative traced how in the latter part of the eighteenth century many narratives employed devices of the "blood and thunder shocker" – the accounts of bodily mutilation were painstakingly exact, but the veracity of the entire episode was highly dubious.

The documentary truth of many narratives cannot be fully established. Their power lies in their capacity to move the reader to emotions and to action. But does this power operate because the reader identifies with a protagonist such as Mary Rowlandson, because the reader is or wants to be like her? As Michele Burnham has written with respect to Rowlandson, “seventeenth-century Puritans, by imagining themselves in the captive’s place, might strive to resemble a converted and reformed Rowlandson” (1997: 42). But Burnham goes on to say that “the tears that are so often a sign of sentimental identification – of the successful establishment of this relation of apparent equivalence – result . . . not from the seamless substitution of self for other but from the necessary margin of inequivalence produced by such an exchange” (47). As another illustration of this consider a strategy employed by some slave narratives and termed by Rafia Zafar an “irony of inversion” that “infuses the ordeals of the colonial African American Christians with an often unexpressed, if perhaps privately acknowledged, racial ambiguity” (Zafar, 1997: 42). The black narrator claims for him or her self all the familial love, Christian piety, and ethical scruples that the most self-righteous white reader might exude, rejecting the common racist belief that blacks had no tender feelings, and for example, could not blush. Some narratives take this process a step further; the horrors of slavery are represented as threatening not only to blacks but to whites as well. Lewis Clarke provoked his readers with the announcement that in Kentucky “The whiter a man is, the lower down they keep him. I knew a slave that was *all* white. I might tell you his name, and where he lived. I believe I will. No, I won’t either” (Sayre, 1994: 316). William and Ellen Craft’s *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* recounts the escape of this couple from slavery in Georgia in 1848 using a remarkable ploy. Ellen, the pale-complexioned daughter of her master and a mixed-race mother, disguised herself as a white man, while her husband William posed as the man’s slave, serving her obsequiously during several days’ travel by steamship and railroad to Philadelphia. The transracial, transgendered disguise is depicted in the book’s frontispiece, and Ellen reenacted it for public appearances at abolitionist rallies. As if to reinforce the point, the narrative opens with the anecdote of an orphaned German immigrant to Louisiana, Salomé Muller, who was sold as a slave by her late father’s employer, and freed only after a lengthy court battle. This historical fact suggested to the white reader that it could happen to you, or to your daughter, a fear likely to strike much closer to home than a mere humanitarian appeal to halt the horror of slavery as it was applied to blacks. And if Ellen could successfully masquerade as a white man (a possible inspiration for the episode in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* where George Harris escapes by disguising himself as a Spanish Creole planter), then the system of visual discrimination between black and white could not hold firm. From a literary point of view, Ellen Craft’s transgendered disguise can be read as a literal incorporation of the transformations that form the crux of many fugitive slave narratives. The passage from slave to free implied a narrative of salvation, from damned to saved, and, more subversively, a symbolic shift from black to white, and from powerless female to enfranchised male.

The narratives of Indian captivity are often also stories of self-transformation. Rowlandson’s traumatic memories evidently inspired in her a profound religious renewal.

For other captives the change was practical rather than spiritual, and all the more profound. For in a few instances those taken by Indians embraced their new way of life and never returned. Among many Native American tribes it was customary to adopt some prisoners taken by war parties, particularly females and children, as tribal members who might replace those lost in earlier conflicts. Early New England captivity texts such as those of John Gyles, Hannah Swarton, and Jemima Howe tell of relatives and acquaintances who stayed with the Indians or with the French Catholics of Quebec (who were just as bad, from the Puritan point of view). One of the best-known cases is that of Mary Jemison. Taken by Shawnees during the Seven Years War, she ended up among the Seneca of Western New York, where she lived with two separate husbands, had at least three children, and owned and cultivated a large tract of land alongside the Genesee River into the 1820s, when she was in her eighties. Another is John Tanner, captured at age nine in 1790, who lived among Ojibwa and Cree in the Canadian north for 30 years. Many others, including Frances Slocum and Eunice Williams, were not able to dictate narratives that would reach the Anglophone audience of their previous culture, but still achieved renown as “unredeemed captives.” In the terminology of the Early Modern Mediterranean world, these were “*renegados*,” individuals who when captured by the Muslim North Africans, renounced their (Catholic or Protestant) faith and took up the practices of their captors. Their lives were often scandalous, subversive of the ideology of those who collected and published their stories (Cotton Mather for Swarton, Dr. James Seaver in the case of Jemison), for these captives embraced religious or cultural heresy. As in the case of modern *renegados* such as the “American Taliban” John Walker Lindh, mainstream white America reacted to such traitors with a combination of horror and fascination tinged with sympathy; they were haunted with the idea that “it could have been *my* son.” And just as Lindh faced prosecution, even the “redeemed captive” did not always return to the fold without difficulties. Neal Salisbury in his annotated edition of Mary Rowlandson’s narrative argues that she wrote in part to rebut accusations that she had somehow been corrupted or had collaborated with her captors. June Namias’s study of Sarah Wakefield reveals that the US military response to the Sioux uprising in Minnesota in 1862 singled out for punishment the Sioux man, Chaska, who had protected her during her captivity.

In the analysis of several recent critics of the captivity narrative, the transformation or “transculturation” of the captive applies not only to those who remained in Indian communities, but even to those who returned. Several critics have applied the anthropological work of Victor Turner to analyze captivity as a kind of rite of passage, where the captive passes into a liminal status, separated from the community. In *Bound and Determined*, Christopher Castiglia proposes that “the captives’ experience of captivity and crossing cultures occasioned their revision of identities and of the genres that constituted them, which in turn became a way for white women to survive captivity not only by Indians but by a patriarchal prescription at home as well” (1996: 9). Being taken from a domineering husband or father was more liberation than captivity, Castiglia implies, and backs up his claim with readings of what he calls captivity romances, novels such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, Lydia Maria Child’s

Hobomok, or “Harriet Cheney’s *A Peep at the Pilgrims*, in which the heroine rushes into her Indian captivity to escape the more dangerous constraints placed on her at home” (115). A recent trend in cultural studies has been to conceive of “captivity” not strictly as prisoners taken by Indians in frontier warfare, but much more broadly as any kind of coercion and control based on gender, race, or even age. This trend has facilitated comparisons between the captivity narrative and the slave narrative, and called attention to the fact that even free African-Americans in the North often suffered from severe restraints. This lesson is evident in the title of Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-story White House, North. Showing that Slavery’s Shadows Fall Even There*, published anonymously in 1859. Wilson based the story on her own experience as the orphaned daughter of a white mother and a black father, raised as a servant in the household of a well-to-do Massachusetts family.

Expanding the definition of “captivity” or of “slavery” carries the risk of trivializing the suffering these authors worked so hard to document; a wife is not held captive by her husband in the same sense as a prisoner is held captive by the state or a slave by a slaveholder. But the trend has also had important consequences – Pauline Turner Strong and I have each called attention to the fact that while perhaps a couple thousand colonists were taken captive by Indian warriors, thousands of Indians were confined, displaced, or killed by colonial and United States armies. As Shari Huhndorf and others have argued, the captivity narrative’s sentimental pull worked to justify campaigns of genocide against Indians.

Texts like Wilson’s *Our Nig* or Elizabeth Ashbridge’s 1774 *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge* may also serve to call attention to the various types or degrees of slavery and servitude practiced in early America. Plantation slavery in the nineteenth-century American South developed to maximize production of the two most valuable colonial commodities, cotton and tobacco, and imitated the exploitative techniques used in the West Indies to produce sugar. Eli Whitney’s invention of the Cotton Gin in 1793 (which made possible the large-scale production of short-staple cotton, which grew in more areas than the longer varieties) together with the industrialization of the textile industry in Britain, Europe, and New England, led to ever more intensive and inhumane practices of slave labor in the South, and entrenched the sectional division with the North. Although plantation slavery was an agricultural enterprise it was inextricably linked to industrial capitalism.

The patterns of servitude in North America before this era are less widely known. In eighteenth-century North America, slavery was legal in all the colonies from New Mexico to Maine, but nearly all slaves worked on small farms or in households rather than on large plantations. Most households consisted not of an exclusive nuclear family unit, but an extended kin group as well as slaves and/or indentured servants. Indentured servitude obliged the servant to work for a master for a number of years, usually seven or fourteen, or until a certain age. Each party was supposed to sign copies of a contract which were notched or “indented” together. The system accommodated a wide range of classes. At the upper end, the young Benjamin Franklin was indentured to his older brother James to learn the printing trade. At the lower end, petty

criminals in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England were often sentenced to terms of indentured servitude in the colonies. An undated broadside ballad by James Revel told of "The Poor Unhappy Transported Felon's Sorrowful Account of his Fourteen Years Transportation, at Virginia, in America." A tobacco planter from Rappahannock country purchased his indenture as he disembarked, and he labored alongside eighteen slaves and five other transportees, "We and the Negroes both alike did fare, / Of work and food we had an equal share; / But in a piece of ground we call our own, / The food we eat first by ourselves were sown." In between the status of Franklin and that of Revel lay the thousands of emigrants to North America who signed indentures in exchange for their passage across the Atlantic, and were sold by the ships' captains or owners to dealers called "redemptionists," who resold them to farmers or others who needed laborers. Because indentured servants, unlike slaves, became free at the end of their terms, and sometimes received payments of clothing, tools, or even land, the system was extolled by some writers, such as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and George Alsop, as a great opportunity for self-betterment. But as Ashbridge documented, it was also liable to abuses, particularly for unmarried women who were sold as brides or mates, and for their children. When slavery was abolished in the Northern states in the early nineteenth century, most instituted a phasing out period which made slaves into servants until they reached a certain age. In New York a 1799 law delayed full emancipation until 1827, and in New Jersey some remained enslaved until 1865. During reconstruction after the Civil War, some southern whites tried to perpetuate slavery under the guise of indentured servitude, and the new practices of sharecropping and entitlements to "forty acres and a mule" also resembled the old system. The mid-nineteenth-century slave narratives that were promoted by northern abolitionists cast southern slaveholders as villains akin to the heathen savages of the popular captivity narratives, but earlier texts could not so easily focus the wrath of the sympathetic reader on a recognizable villain.

Perhaps by coincidence, we find episodes of Indian captivity in a couple of the earliest published narratives of African-Americans. The *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* (Boston, 1760) includes the story of how Hammon was shipwrecked on the Florida coast, and captured by Indians who killed many of his shipmates: "they intended to roast me alive. But the Providence of God order'd it other ways" (7). Hammon was rescued by a Spanish ship that takes him to Cuba, only to spend four and half years in prison after refusing to serve in the Spanish navy. The longer and better-known *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black (Now going to Preach the Gospel in Nova Scotia)* (London, 1785) tells of how as a young man in Charleston, South Carolina, he befriended a Cherokee hunter who took him back to the tribe's village. When imprisoned and threatened with death, Marrant says, "the Lord impressed a strong desire upon my mind to turn into their language, and pray in their tongue. I did so, and with remarkable liberty, which wonderfully affected the people. One circumstance was very singular, and strikingly displays the power and grace of God. I believe the executioner was savingly converted to God" (Sayre, 2000: 213). The daughter of the tribe's "king"

was also powerfully affected by Marrant's recitations from the Bible. The episode is reminiscent of John Smith's story of being rescued from Powhatan by Pocahontas, but for Marrant it was his allusions to the book of Daniel that mattered most. His success at converting the Cherokee demonstrated that God had favored him, and suggested that he would have similar success in backwoods Nova Scotia, where he was to be resettled alongside native Micmacs and some of the thousands of slaves who had secured their freedom by fighting on the British side in the Revolutionary War.

John Marrant was never a slave, and Briton Hammon, referred to in his subtitle as "Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New England" may not have been either. In their texts, as in early autobiographies of Afro-British freed slaves such as Olaudah Equiano and John Jea, we find only faint echoes of the captivity and slave narrative genres, and much stronger evidence of tropes from several other popular narrative genres of the time. Chief among these is the spiritual autobiography or conversion narrative. As David D. Hall wrote of his study of popular religion in New England, these narratives "dramatized the lives of ordinary men and women, long before the novel emerged as a genre that encompassed everyday (that is, not royal or chivalric) experience" (1989: 57). The same holds true of the captivity narrative. And since many churches required a public profession of conversion from their new members, this was a narrative form that was familiar even to the newly or barely literate, and that commanded respect from white audiences. Like Marrant, John Jea, Boston King, and George White were all black preachers whose narratives attested to their own piety and their success in converting others. James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, though not a minister, recalled how the first books he read were Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Grace Abounding unto the Chief of Sinners* and Richard Baxter's *Call to the Converted*, staples of seventeenth-century dissenting Protestantism. Afro-American autobiography from the start was concerned about the quest for freedom, but as William L. Andrews has observed, "the captivity and conversion genres offered models that could express and justify that quest in spiritual terms which did not seem to threaten white institutions" (1986: 46).

Another popular form that contributes to these early African-American texts is the providence tale, which James D. Hartman defines as "stories that relate the activities of God on earth" (1999: 1), notably miraculous deliverances from storms and shipwrecks. Because merchant or naval seaman was one of the few occupations open to blacks, and because enslaved Africans knew all too well the hazards of crossing the Atlantic, shipboard stories are prominent in these texts. Both John Jea and Olaudah Equiano tell anecdotes of an apostate sailor who, moments after uttering an heretical oath, falls overboard to his death. As a further sign of his own divine calling, John Marrant claims that in a violent storm he was thrice washed overboard, only to be swept back onto his ship. Equiano's narrative includes a story from his career as a merchant captain, when, struggling to keep his leaky vessel afloat, "I began to express my impatience, and I uttered the oath, 'Damn the vessel's bottom out'" (1995: 148). Sure enough, the boat wrecks and strands him and his crew on New Providence Island in the Bahamas.

Equiano, Marrant, Gronniosaw, Boston King, George White, John Jea, and the poet Phyllis Wheatley had something else in common. All were Methodists, followers of the religious sect that arose in the mid eighteenth century under the leadership of John Wesley and a series of eloquent and well-traveled preachers who toured Britain and the American colonies. The most famous was George Whitefield, whose sermons were heard by Equiano, by Benjamin Franklin, and many other contemporary memoirists, and who was the direct cause of Marrant's conversion. Many of the eighteenth-century Anglo-African authors and preachers were supported by the Countess of Huntingdon, a philanthropist close to Whitefield. Methodism criticized the complacency and conservatism of established churches and ministers, Anglican or otherwise, and supported a cadre of itinerants who preached to crowds in public places or at camp meetings. The powerful, "fire and brimstone" style of these orators often induced dramatic conversions characterized by convulsions, visions, or glossalalia (speaking in tongues). Methodism's radical populism appealed to the working classes and to ethnic minorities, and converts could rise to the status of minister without any formal education. Consistent with the pattern of radical Protestant sects, however, by the early 1800s Methodism had spawned its own ecclesiastical hierarchy, and these authorities often placed constraints on the rise of black preachers such as George White. In response, the Philadelphia minister Richard Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first African-American denomination. In the mid-nineteenth century the anti-slavery movement continued to attract many of its most fervent supporters from the more radical protestant sects – Quakers, of course, including Angelina Grimké Weld and John Greenleaf Whittier, but also Unitarians such as Lydia Maria Child. Against this backdrop, Frederick Douglass stands out for his strong critique of the complicity of churches with slavery in the appendix to his *Narrative*. Douglass also insisted that after his master Captain Auld experienced conversion at a Methodist camp-meeting he merely "found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty" (*Heath Anthology*, 6th edn., 2009: Vol. B, 2069).

Douglass's conversion moment was not one of Christian faith, but of English literacy. When his Mistress Mrs. Auld "kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C" and her husband quickly forbade it, "It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things . . . to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man" (2059–60) though many slave narrators remained unlettered and told their stories through an amanuensis, for those who did acquire literacy it became a key moment in the plot of their narratives. Douglass subsequently cajoled white Baltimore children into sharing their knowledge of ciphering and spelling. John Jea claimed that an angel had come to him and "taught me to read the first chapter of the gospel according to St. John" (Hodges, 1993: 113) and that he ever after remained incapable of reading any text but the Bible. Henry Louis Gates Jr. has documented how Equiano, Marrant, Gronniosaw, and Jea all represented their first experience of writing through versions of what he called "the Trope of the Talking Book," evidence of a nascent literary tradition in the earliest black anglophone authors. After listening to someone read to them, the young Africans tell how they held the book up to their ears, and listened

for its words. This trope can be traced to the story of the Inca king Atahualpa, who when captured by Francisco Pizarro was forced to accept the truth of the Bible. He resisted, saying that the book didn't talk to him, and was summarily executed. The effort of the African-American author to write himself into being thus began as a Protestant conversion, a revelation of the word of the Bible, and only later turned against the hypocrisy of Christianity. Regardless of attitude toward religious institutions, the achievements of those former slaves, including Douglass, Henry Bibb, and William Wells Brown, who wrote and published their own narratives and without help from white editors, should not be underestimated.

The realities of slavery or of captivity with the Indians were both so distant from the experience of typical readers that most were poorly equipped to judge what was true or plausible in the narratives they read. Moreover, the sharply politicized climate surrounding both genres, but especially fugitive slave narratives in mid-nineteenth century US, frequently attracted charges that a captive's or slave's story was a propagandist's fabrication. Olaudah Equiano opened his *Interesting Life* by complaining "that what is uncommon is rarely, if ever, believed" (1995: 31). His rhetorical plight was only exacerbated by the fact that many picaresque novels expressed the same idea in their prefaces. An anecdote about Sojourner Truth recounted how at an anti-slavery rally in Indiana in 1858 hecklers spread a rumor that she was actually a man in drag; Sojourner answered the taunts by baring her breast to show the proof. The corpus of captivity narratives includes a few that were most likely invented to fan the flames of anti-Indian propaganda, such as the "Affecting History of the Dreadful Distresses of Frederic Manheim's Family" first published in 1793 and many times reprinted, and a few others that appear to have capitalized upon Noble Primitivism. John Dunn Hunter published in 1823 a narrative that told of being captured as a child so young that he did not recall his birth parents, and growing to maturity among the Kickapoo, Osage, and other tribes on the Great Plains. His book caused a small sensation and he was received in high society when he traveled to Britain, but American detractors published reviews claiming his entire story was a hoax. Careful research by historian Richard Drinnon concludes that Hunter's account is plausible, but not certain. One means by which Hunter and many other former captives lent authority to their narratives was with extensive ethnographic portraits of Indian customs. Early travel writers about America had frequently written in this mode, and a captive could tackle the genre as an expert with an inside view of Native culture. The German Hans Staden's 1557 narrative of captivity among the Tupi of Brazil is perhaps the first such text to include an ethnographic section. Nineteenth-century North American texts often veered from ethnography into an account of the fertile forests and soils of a landscape made ripe for white expansion, expansion justified by the need to retaliate for Indians' captive-taking.

The quest for authenticity is a rhetorical game of mirrors, a quest for mastery of a cultural Other predicated on a dialectic of ignorance and enlightenment. Nonetheless, the need for truth and proof cannot be discounted. One of the most exciting developments in African-American literature over the last 25 years was Jean Fagan Yellin's work on Harriet Jacobs. For over a century, most scholars had assumed that

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, by Linda Brent, was a work of sentimental fiction. But Yellin's careful research revealed that not only was Linda Brent a pseudonym for Harriet Jacobs, but Jacobs's family, the family of her sinister slaveholder Doctor Flint, and nearly all the other characters in the story were real individuals. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s research into *Our Nig*, and most recently Hannah Crafts's *The Bondswoman's Narrative* are parallel developments. These nineteenth-century black women writers wrote their stories under assumed names and in the form of novels, and now that their documentary truth has been recognized these texts offer an important complement to the genre of slave narratives that were promoted and published by northern abolitionists. The reticence of Jacobs, Wilson, and Crafts might be explained not only by their desire to protect people who had helped them escape, but also by the hostile suspicion that many fugitive slaves faced from those who sought to discredit them and the abolitionist movement. In a few instances fugitive slaves and their narratives were exposed. The *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, by Mattie Griffith, turned out to be a fiction penned by a white woman of that name. The case of the *Narrative of James Williams* is more ambiguous. The well-known poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier served as editor and amanuensis for this text published in 1838, but hostile reviewers quickly challenged the veracity of Williams's account of slaveholders in Greene County, Alabama, and its publisher, the American Anti-Slavery Society, withdrew it. No inquiry ever established the true state of affairs, but as William L. Andrews has written, the Williams case revealed "how important the 'performative' feature of a slave's narrative was to securing the credence of its original and most crucial audience, the abolitionists" (1986: 88). Not only were public appearances by fugitive slaves important for promoting their stories and their cause, in the case of non-literate subjects, the oral delivery of their story to an amanuensis was a performance as well. James Williams's dignified and restrained manner of recalling the horrific cruelty he suffered matched what abolitionists wanted to hear. According to his sponsors Williams, like Frederick Douglass, spoke with "the style and usages of the best society" (Andrew, 1986: 89) and therefore could represent to white eyes and ears the dignity and cultural potential of his race. Yet paradoxically, stereotypical black vernacular speech could also function as a mark of authenticity for the slave narrator, in person and in print. Sojourner Truth's disarming wit and loquacious drawl were her trademarks, as captured in her famous line, "a'n't I a woman." Her plea for racial and gender equality spoke so powerfully to audiences one hundred years later, that an Illinois state education board chose to use it in a standardized test, only they insisted on cleaning up her grammar, rendering it "am I not a woman?"

Many former Indian captives, especially women, also had their narratives edited, or appropriated, by white men. Hannah Swarton and Hannah Dustan's stories from the 1690s were written and published by Cotton Mather, and the author of the preface to Mary Rowlandson's narrative, who signed himself "Ter Amicam" was probably Cotton's father Increase, the patriarch of Boston Puritans 20 years earlier. Modern readers of Mary Jemison's narrative struggle to sift out Jemison's actual spoken discourse from the mass of sentimental and historical editorializing by her amanuensis, James Seaver.

The Captivity of the Oatman Girls among the Apache and Mojave Indians is an even more troubling text. Royal B. Stratton, a California preacher, approached Olive Oatman upon her release in 1856 and became her impresario. He wrote and published her story and planned a lengthy publicity tour that capitalized on the visual authenticity of Olive's facial tattoos. He also apparently pocketed all the proceeds. Because a freed captive, like a fugitive slave, often found her or himself bereft of family, home, and monetary support, the story of bondage and redemption was sometimes the only asset he or she could sell. The exploitative dangers of the situation are manifest also in the autobiographies of Indians Black Hawk and Geronimo, who dictated life histories to white editors from the position of captured enemy combatants. The "as-told-to" life history remained the prevalent mode of American Indian autobiography well into the twentieth century, as Arnold Krupat and David Brumble have shown, and anthropologists and human rights workers continue to seek out such testimonies from indigenous peoples. Critical methodologies for reading such texts still need further development, for the instinct is to read past the editor toward the "authentic voice" of the subject, and yet the best editors are those, such as Lydia Maria Child or John Tanner's editor Edwin James, whose touch was so subtle as to evade notice.

Many of the first works in English by women and by Africans in North America are slave narratives and captivity narratives, and these texts are frequently taught in college classrooms. Many fine anthologies of the two genres are available, and many of the works are short, and written in an appealing vernacular style. The suspense and emotional power of these works is nearly as strong today as it was 150 years ago. They are frequently more complex than they appear, however, for many have complicated editorial origins, and many build upon tropes and traditions that become obvious only after one has read dozens of the more obscure examples of the genre.

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The Early Republic: Forms and Readers

Trish Loughran

1. From Literary Canon to Actually Existing Archive

Even in this post-multiculturalist moment, with many seminal identity-based recovery projects now in some cases several decades past (from Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction* to Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* to the first editions of the *Heath Anthology*), the canon still remains for many readers the dominant way of understanding who we read and why in the field imaginary called American Literature. In early national studies – focused on the literature of the early republic, from the political writings of the American Revolution to the first substantial professional successes of fiction writers like Irving and Cooper in the 1820s – there is a clear canon that includes Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Phyllis Wheatley, Judith Sargent Murray, William Hill Brown, Hannah Foster, Susanna Rowson, Royall Tyler, Charles Brockden Brown, and Joseph Dennie. Like most canons, this list for the most part follows the familiar logic of exemplarity (which is at work even when the canon is being opened up to underrepresented social types). Most of these figures merit inclusion because they are considered either a “first” or “most important.” Tyler, for example, is the author of “the first” American stage comedy; William Hill Brown is the author of “the first” American novel; Rowson penned the first widely selling American novel; Dennie edited the first self-sustaining literary periodical; while Murray and Wheatley distinguished themselves for being among the first notable women and, in Wheatley's case, African-American authors.

Such reasoning aside, the first thing one might notice about this list is its relative incoherence, compared to a similar list drawn from the American Renaissance. There is a certain (Romantic) unity to the author-set of Irving, Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Whitman, Dickinson – a coherence that maintains itself even when we begin to open up the edges of the list to include the likes of Susan Warner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, or Frederick Douglass. In almost every case, the author in question considers him or herself just that – an author – and he or she is born in North America,

under the political sign of federal union called the United States of America, usually writing in English and publishing books in the same nation-space that produced him or her –and doing so, furthermore, for readers that are (juridically at least) quite similar to himself or herself – in other words, fellow Americans.

This kind of cultural coherence is harder to find in the early republic. Paine was announced, on the title page of his most “American” text (*Common Sense*), to be an “Englishman.” Franklin, though he is regarded in many ways as the “first” American, was for much of his life an Anglophile apologist for the British Empire. His *Autobiography* may be one of the most re-read and reprinted texts in the early national canon, but he initially began it as a private memoir addressed only to his son and it did not in fact become available in the United States in its current form until 1818. The first printed edition was not only partial (containing a mere fraction of the text we now call the *Autobiography*), but it was initially published in France, in a French translation, under a different title. Jefferson was unlike Franklin in that he was always a reluctant author, but his one extended masterwork, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, shares a curiously similar publication history to the *Autobiography*. Uncomfortable with his potential reading audience in America, Jefferson nervously mailed the manuscript of *Notes* out of the newly formed United States, preferring to have it published in France (once again, in French) and diligently working to defer its appearance not only in North America but in the English language. To take another example: Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth* was neither authored nor originally published in the United States – even though it has long been claimed as an American classic, usually credited as the first widely selling American novel and standing in most literary anthologies and surveys as the most significant precursor to the sentimental blockbusters of the 1850s. Indeed, Rowson’s “Americanist” credentials are further muddled by the fact that she came from a family of Tories, making her (at least in the 1770s) a confirmed anti-American Revolutionary – as was Crèvecoeur, that shifty Frenchman who, writing a book about America in French for an avidly anti-American British audience, penned a quietly critical chapter called “What Is an American?” that still sometimes stands misrecognized today as an un-ironic paean to the newly formed yeoman republic.

I will return later in the chapter to the problem of nationalism in the new republic, and the enormous burden that has been placed on cultural production from 1775 to 1820 to be national without “really” being a national literature (since that is the cultural task claimed for the American Renaissance, with its unmistakably “literary” offerings of Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman). For now, it is enough to note that there is not much continuity between “America” and its early national canon, nor between that canon and the real world of print culture that was emerging in and around the early United States between 1775 and 1820. This is clear when one compares not just the texts that appear in major field syntheses but the structure such syntheses take. For example, Robert E. Spiller, the executive editor of the magisterial *Literary History of the United States*, first published in 1946 (five years after Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*), positioned the early republic both within a larger field taxonomy (or literary chronology) and interiorly organized his discussion of it as a

formal taxonomy. Thus, his *Literary History* begins with three massive chapters on “The Colonies,” “The Republic,” and “The Democracy” followed by two on “Literary Fulfillment” and “Crisis” that are intended to take the reader up and into the Civil War. “The Colonies” section is organized regionally, with Benjamin Franklin serving as the link forward to “The Republic,” which is itself interiorly organized via a standard generic taxonomy: thus, Spiller devotes one section to pamphlets in the American Revolution, one to the essays of philosopher-statesmen like Hamilton and Jefferson, one to poetry and *belles-lettres*, one to fiction, and one to drama. Such a rigorously coherent literary taxonomy would appear to be New Critical at base precisely because of its studious attention to form as an organizing principle. But in fact the same basic organization adheres in many more recent treatments of the same subject. Michael Gilmore, in his excellent extended discussion of “The Literature of the Revolutionary and Early National Periods” for the *Cambridge History of American Literature*, follows a similar format, breaking his quarry into the following chapter-categories: the essay, the drama, poetry, and the novel.

We know, however, that these literary taxonomies do not do justice to the actually existing archive, any more than the more limited canon represented in literary anthologies and college surveys does. The Evans *Bibliography of Early American Imprints* (which includes everything printed in America from 1639 to 1800) consists of more than 37,000 printed items (from major texts to ephemera) that together explode the narrowness of such discussions. In the digital edition of Evans (now available at many major research libraries), we find a homepage that boasts not five early American genres but 91: from the usual suspects (autobiographies, novels, plays, poems, and songs) to the slightly more esoteric (almanacs, atlases, broadsides, catechisms, chapbooks, dictionaries, grammars, primers, sermons, and spellers) to the more unusual and unexpected (acrostics, cookbooks, directories, epitaphs, erotica, games, perpetual calendars, rebuses, treaties, and wills). But not even Evans suggests the full range of early American reading habits. Evans does not include, for example, newspapers and magazines – themselves massive miscellanies whose internal variousness reproduces the formal heterogeneity of the Evans index. Likewise, the Evans bibliography contains only American imprints (things printed, in other words, in North America), but in fact readers in the early republic were as likely to be reading a Dublin or London imprint as a North American one, since early American print culture was in large part an import culture.

This is another way of saying that the forms available to readers in the early United States tend to exceed our current models for describing early American literature. People read many different kinds of things that are rarely discussed in literary criticism (including rebuses and acrostics), while many of the items that are the staples of early American studies were not read at all by that many actual readers. It is true, of course, that in some rare cases inclusion into the early national canon is merited on the basis of wide readership (most notably, as I will describe in a moment, in the cases of Thomas Paine and Susanna Rowson). But more frequently the great texts of the early republic were not widely read but rejected or quite contracted in circulation: Jefferson’s *Notes*, when it finally arrived in the US in English (imported from England,

where he preferred to see them printed) was available only in small numbers and did not (Jefferson's anxiety to contain its circulation aside) appeal to a general reader, both because of its intense focus on Virginia as a representative subject (surely less appealing in, say New England, than in the Tidewater States) and because of the general level of learnedness that pervades the project. *Notes on the State of Virginia* may stand today as a fascinating example of the Enlightenment mind in struggle against itself, but it is only representative of its cultural moment in the same way that Virginia was geographically representative: through the synecdochal, or partial, logic of an elite literary culture in conversation with itself. Jefferson's masterpiece thus tells the truth of only a small part of early American culture, rather than speaking for the whole, yet through the trope of representativeness has nevertheless come to be read as a generalizable "American" text, about America's founding.

The same might be said of *The Federalist*, which is probably today the most influential of these early American master-texts (in that it is read and cited in courts throughout the nation not just by lawyers but by judges and justices). Its anti-federalist political opponents mocked *The Federalist's* "unmeaning sentences" and "long-winded disquisitions," bemoaning the reader's "fatigue" and the paper its speaker, Publius, had "wasted." Political allies brushed those criticisms aside, as Washington did when he famously declared that *The Federalist* "will merit the notice of Posterity." But while Washington was, of course, correct, the fact remains that most eighteenth-century readers were more ambivalent about Publius' impossible prolixity. A reader did not, in other words, need to be an anti-federalist to find Publius a dry, rambling bore. The *Papers* were obnoxious enough to prompt 26 New York subscribers to beg their local printer to discontinue the series. As an eighteenth-century reader opined: "The Federalist unquestionably is a treatise, which displays learning and deep penetration. It is an ingenious, elaborate, and in some places, sophisticated defence of the Constitution." But "altho written in a correct, smooth stile it is from its prolixity, tiresome. I honestly confess," this reader confides to his son, "that I could not read it thro." Many readers agreed with this assessment. Enough numbers of the original 1788 edition remained unsold to allow the printer John Tieboul to bring out a second edition in 1799 merely by pasting new boards on the unsold remainders.

The Federalist is a particularly apt example to describe how the problem of forms and readers in the early republic is not yet being thought about in early American literary studies. The texts that have yet to be really studied in this field are not those that are exemplary – like *The Federalist* – for being the best or the first but those that are actually representative – which is to say, actual examples of what people really liked to read. For what is at stake in any discussion of reception in the early United States must finally be an account of who read what, and why, and how this reading did or did not help to call forth not just the national literature that arrives on American doorsteps in the serialized form of *The Sketch Book* in 1819 but the nation itself. As even a cursory tour through Evans makes clear, the forms and readers of the early republic have only one true thing in common, and that is their essential plurality. There were many different forms, and there were many different kinds of readers in the early republic,

readers whose access to and preference for certain types of reading materials was mediated by any number of circumstances (from institutional affiliations – like libraries, schools, family, and church – to the fatalistic identity-accidents of region, race, gender, age, and class). I would suggest that the endless plurality of the categories of forms and readers is belied throughout the field of early American studies by the monolithic construction of the scene of founding, or “early national” political culture as a coherent, unified event. And for this reason, the purpose of this chapter will ultimately be to outline how, in early American literary studies, the field has tended to narrate and suppress the relations between (the many) forms and readers and (the one) nation. My wish is to make this gap between the texts we valorize today as “representative” and what historical people were actually reading more visible, and to think about and theorize the stakes of that gap and its potential visibility.

2. Theories of Cultural Access

Charles Wilson Peale’s famous self-portrait, *The Artist in His Museum* (see Figure 12.1), is the Rip Van Winkle of American painting. Like Irving’s tale, the painting takes as its primary topic the passage of time. This is especially useful for our purposes here, for the unit of time Peale dramatizes is the same one that continues to dominate the field paradigms that separate early national literature from antebellum, or Romantic, American literature. While the painting was completed in 1822 – the same moment Irving’s and Cooper’s careers in print were igniting – it nevertheless positions Peale as the curator of the museum he founded once upon a time in the 1780s, when it was still housed in the old State House of Pennsylvania. Standing in the foreground of the painting and gesturing to us – his latter-day viewers – with a weirdly ominous welcoming flourish, the cadaverous museum keeper does not merely usher us into the back(ground) of his painting or the gallery of his museum but back in time as well into the sealed time capsule of national history. In doing so, the painting actively takes as its topic the same foundational era under consideration here, explicitly proffering a reading about the historical construction of art, artists, and their audiences from the Revolution to 1820. In doing so, the painting asks the question: who is in charge of cultural knowledge in the early republic, how is it organized, and who consumes it? And more to the point, how do the answers to these questions change over time?

The answer to this second question is widely agreed upon. Most scholars agree that there was little professionalization in the American arts before 1820. Indeed, the most notable innovation in American culture after 1820 is that the figure of the “artist” – like that of the “author” – emerges as a newly autonomous, professionalized category – so that painting and writing become occupations that can be aspired to rather than acts of leisure or financial suicide. The painting’s coy title and its strange telescoping of time strongly suggest that Peale too was aware of this development, since he makes a point to “historicize” the emergence of such categories here, staging the portrait of himself and his museum as part of a long historical process. Thus if the painting

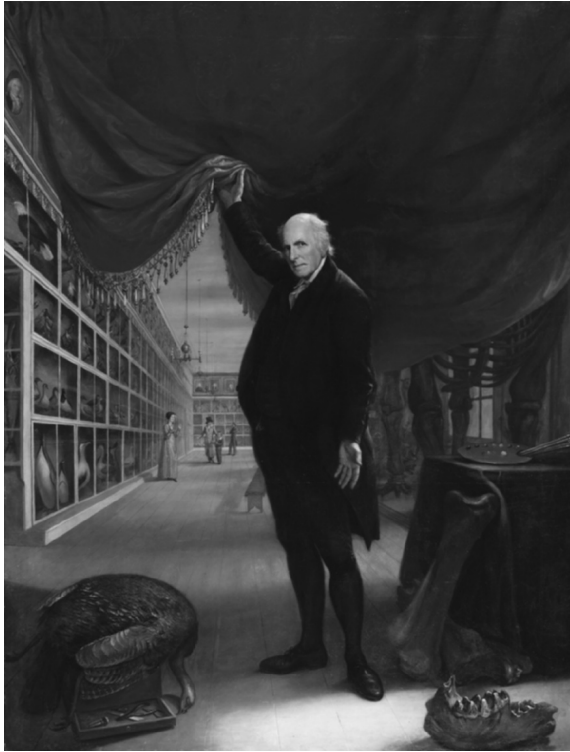


Figure 12.1 Charles Wilson Peale, *The Artist in His Museum* (1822), Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

suggests, as some readers have noted, that artists produce history, it also suggests the opposite: that history produces artists like Peale and institutions like his museum.

The painting is like a joke whose punch line remains elusive. On one hand, Peale invites his viewers in off the street to participate in the art, history, and science that is his museum, past and present. On the other, he does so in a curiously ominous way, taking up the trappings of a funeral director in such a way that we have to wonder whether, in entering the museum, we (like the figures behind the curtain) will become objects in it – embalmed birds and flayed skeletons. It is part of the humor of the painting that Peale includes himself in the taxidermical-like process of historicization. Indeed, dressed almost entirely in black, Peale resembles not just a funeral director here but an actual cadaver – an artifact, like everything (and everyone) else in the museum. As if to make this connection more concrete, the artist’s rotund black-suited middle visually echoes one of the many stuffed birds that is held up for display inside the museum (which, in yet another joke inside the joke, proves to be an emperor penguin, positioned to the left of Peale).

All of this suggests Peale’s awareness that, by 1820, American arts and art institutions had undergone a distinct historical process. Perhaps most notably, for our purposes here, the painting endows Peale with the title of “artist” but, in a nod to his

actual occupational origins, it also shows him taking on many different work roles, just as he did in the early years of his life as a painter in Philadelphia. Most notably his palette (placed in foreground on the left) is balanced (on the right) with a set of taxidermical tools. The pairing of these objects is intended to remind viewers of the artisanal roots of aesthetics. In the early republic, no painter or poet was successful enough to be only known as a painter or poet, and Peale was no exception. The early republic's most prominent portraitist was in fact originally trained as a saddle maker, a craft whose tools bear a passing resemblance to the iron and leather taxidermical kit displayed here, tools Peale used to stuff birds and animals for display throughout his museum.

The link between painting and taxidermy reveals another well known fact about early American culture: that its boundaries and disciplinary compartments were not as demarcated as they would later become in the high American Renaissance. After 1820, literature becomes literature in such a way that students in English classes are far more likely to receive a healthy dose of recognizably imaginative literature (poetry, stories, novels, and plays) if they are studying the period *after* 1820 than before. Peale's museum is a figure for this productive cacophony in that it blends the realms of science, politics, and art in ways that no longer make sense after 1820, as each of these categories becomes more distinct and is finally housed, as they are today, in a museum of its own.

But the most important thing to recognize about the painting is the way that it visually figures a scene of cultural reception, or consumption, that is all too often obscured by historical distance. As I've already suggested, the primary question the painting poses has to do with cultural access. Like many texts in the new republic, this one asks us to think about who is in charge of cultural knowledge. For many critics, the answer has uncontroversially followed the American Enlightenment's own republican metafiction, whereby universal access is presumably granted to all, regardless of social conditions like gender, race, or class, by virtue of membership in a larger community. As one critic notes of Peale's portrait: "by reaching out to educate the general public, cultural institutions like Peale's museum helped create the informed citizenry on which the Republic depended." Yet the field of reception portrayed in Peale's museum is, as David Brigham has noted, also highly differentiated and hierarchized. The museum might at first glance appear to open its doors to every age or gender, with two men, a woman, and a child all pictured perusing its exhibits. But two things might be noted about the supposedly universalizing reach of the museum's knowledge-project. First, the only audience Peale imagines or remembers here is a white one. And second, even among the white visitors to the museum, there is a clear division of affective labor. The solitary male visitor maintains the most refined, or enlightened, pose, completely absorbed in rational speculation. A second male visitor escorts a child, who is in the process of being instructed by his tutor what to think. But the lone woman in the museum has turned away from this scene of learning and looks instead on a monstrous mammoth skeleton that hails her to take up an irrational subject position, thus cementing her place opposite the cool reserve of the museum's masculine visitors.

We need only compare the scene of differentiated cultural reception in Peale's museum portrait to the republican fiction of upward mobility we have inherited from Franklin's *Autobiography* to see its radical consequences. Franklin explicitly models a vertical field of accomplishment ("the ladder of success" or "way to wealth") that is nevertheless opened up to him through the horizontal playing field presented, culturally, by print. In print, all things are equal because bodies are absent, and Franklin, with his artful adoption of masks and personae, is the perfect epitome of this process, identified by Michael Warner under the umbrella term "republican print ideology." Regardless of who "really" wrote different essays, poems, plays, or fictions, in the early republic, their voices can, if they so choose, appear genderless, raceless – unmarked – and this is how Franklin, a poor apprentice boy, is able to finally arrive at the status of representative man and founding father. But Peale's portrait is wonderful precisely because it places before our eyes the very thing that print and printedness would seem to obscure: the actual bodies of cultural consumers as they existed in the early days of the republic. Where Franklin disappears into the abstractions of textuality, Peale places himself in front of us and then reveals as well the differentiated scene of cultural consumption as it plays out across different kinds embodied identities. In this sense, the *Autobiography* hides and disassembles about the inequities that continue to structure republican culture while the museum painting assembles and reveals them.

In this way, Peale's painting takes us into a major debate at the heart of early American literary studies: the emerging tension between, on one hand, an older republican order that is organized around communal, public, civic, and above all deferential values and, on the other hand, a newly emerging liberal order that is organized around individualistic and acquisitive values. In the history of the book, numerous scholars have attempted to enter this conversation by describing how and when books became commodities exchanged in an open marketplace. Beyond the question of when books became commodities, however, lies the larger and more provocative question of whether their status as commodities has revolutionary potential in and of itself.

The question of cultural access that Peale frames for us – of who is and is not included in the project of both nation-building and secular Enlightenment – has in fact been the major question in American literary studies in the past 25 years, ever since the early republic reemerged in the 1980s as a serious topic of intellectual conversation among literary critics. Robert Ferguson engages this question in his work on the American Enlightenment, developing a model of "consensual founding" that is steeped in a belief in reading and texts. For Ferguson, "understanding the American Revolution is a literary pursuit" because "revolutionary Americans read voraciously" (1997: 347, 350). Cathy Davidson likewise pursues the question of reading in her discussion of gender and the early American novel, joining questions of genre to a history of reception and thus connecting the disparate questions of forms and readers into a cohesive theory about the role of literacy and literary artifacts in post-revolutionary America. Indeed, Davidson has made two major contributions to our understanding of this period: first, in her turn to a more materialist history of the book approach and second, in making gender a central term of analysis in an early American canon

that has too often been dominated by the white, the elite, but most of all the male. Thus while Ferguson ultimately concludes his work with a discussion of the “limits of Enlightenment,” noting the exclusionary nature of the public documents and ideologies he explores, Davidson makes a major claim for the novel’s radical *inclusiveness*. She writes: “the early novel spoke to those not included in the established power structures of the early Republic and welcomed into the republic of letters citizens who had previously been invited, implicitly and explicitly, to stay out” (1986: 79). What is at stake, however, for both Ferguson and Davidson is the relation of reading and literacy to social power. In the next section, I turn to similar arguments and the two iconic artifacts that have sustained them.

3. Fables of Consumption: The Revolutionary Pamphlet, the Post-Revolutionary Novel, and the Proto-Liberal Republic

The critical consensus about early America’s essential commitments to republicanism and its pre-liberal economic order is complicated by the fact that early American culture does appear to have produced two notable bestsellers that now persist as members of the established literary canon: Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* (1776) and Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791). In these two cases, critics cede the status of commodity to two different kinds of texts (in formal terms, a pamphlet and a novel), and in making such claims for mass circulation and wide reception, they have established a story of cultural access that is not republican at heart but proto-liberal. These two artifacts, more than any others installed in the early national canon, suggest that the new nation had, from the start, the potential to become what Irving and Cooper would make it after 1820: a literary *marketplace* whose wares are available to anyone who could purchase them – whether they be female, poor, uneducated, black, Southern, or even illiterate. The central figure in this proto-liberal fantasy is not so much the author (for it is widely agreed upon that neither Paine nor Rowson capitalized financially on the success of their bestsellers in the same way that, say, Irving later would) but *readers* – or more aptly put, book-buying consumers: purchasers of printed texts that are at one and the same time also understood to be citizens. Indeed, literary consumption is tied, in very profound ways, to acts of political consent in our common critical understandings of these two texts.

Paine’s mythically successful *Common Sense* (1776) provides us with the ultimate case study in how political consent has, in the US, been historically tied to fantasies of (book) consumption (and vice versa). Paine had a vexed life history after his initial involvement with the US Revolution in the late 1770s. He was roundly rejected in the US after the war both by elites and the masses alike, and he spent his last years languishing unappreciated on a farm in New Rochelle, New York, where he was finally buried, unceremoniously, in a modest, untended grave. It was not until the later antebellum period, and especially after 1820, that Paine and his revolutionary contributions were rediscovered and put to new public use. Thus in the 1830s, he emerged as an object of intense historical nostalgia both for a number of local labor societies

and for a new generation of readers of *Common Sense*, which was avidly reprinted on the steam presses of the Jacksonian publishing industry and held up by it as a figure for the populist origins of the American Revolution. A preface to one such edition, published in 1856, makes a standard antebellum claim for the book when it declares, unironically: “This book – COMMON SENSE – calling the American people to arms, and to set up a free government, may be called the book of Genesis, for this was the beginning. From this book sprang the Declaration of Independence, that not only laid the foundation of liberty in our own country, but the good of mankind throughout the world” (Preface to *Common Sense*. New York: G. Vale, 1856).

This story of *Common Sense* the bestseller is a familiar one, even today, for it continues to be told and re-told in history surveys, documentaries, textbooks, and museum exhibits. In such contexts Paine’s pamphlet is typically described as a “bombshell” or an “explosion” – a textual outgrowth of the war itself, consumed ubiquitously and spontaneously by everyone who could read and read aloud in taverns and military tents to those who couldn’t. As the 1990s PBS documentary *Liberty!* proclaimed: “*Common Sense* spoke in plain English to the hundreds of thousands of Americans who read it” and in doing so this “wildly successful pamphlet” helped “push the collective consciousness toward independence.”

Our faith in the wide reception of *Common Sense* is part of a pervasive national myth about the importance of books and reading to the scene of US origins – what I would call the myth of text-based founding. In such narratives, printed texts play a crucial role in uniting the early American populace and legitimating first its separation from England and later its construction of itself into an independent nation. *Common Sense* is our iconic artifact for this collective process, a mythic bestseller whose very popularity signifies for later generations of Americans that they had their origin in a willing and literate American populace, whose unanimous and ubiquitous assent is understood to have forced the decisive, juridical gesture of founding – the Declaration of Independence.

There is neither the need nor the space to assemble an exhaustive material history of *Common Sense* here. It is enough to note at this juncture the fantasy-work that *must* lie behind this fable of ubiquitous mass reception. British America was a vast and semi-disconnected space in 1776, with dozens of printers spread out along 2,500 miles of coastline and struggling with war-time conditions, not to mention a chronic shortage of basic supplies like paper and ink. It is highly unlikely that any one printed text could unite such a space, especially in the early winter months that attended *Common Sense*’s initial publication. Books in general were not commodities that were being moved easily from site to site in the colonies, and publishers in major towns and cities would not have anything more than fragmentary access to the rest of the continent for many decades to come. As Rosalind Remer has said, the colonial printer “tended to produce material of local interest and sponsorship for local markets. While commodities such as molasses, tobacco, and humans linked colonial regions, printed matter was not considered a particularly valuable commodity for trade” (1996: 4). In such a setting, *Common Sense* could conceivably have circulated widely and slowly – but not, as the myth would have it, ubiquitously and spontaneously.

It is tempting to want to know exactly how many copies of Paine's pamphlet really did sell, but a better question would be to ask why and how printed texts, about which we actually know so little, came to be part of such a pervasive national myth. I would suggest it has less to do with the actual reception history of Paine's pamphlet – which was undoubtedly consumed in different ways by different people at different times across the vast landmass of 1776 North America – and more to do with the figure of the book as a mass object, a conception of books and book culture that was increasingly available to nineteenth-century populations. By the 1850s, the concept of the bestseller was materially available to the antebellum reading public, and while there would have been limited documentary evidence to back up the story of *Common Sense* as a transcontinental bestseller (it's a book rarely mentioned in diaries, for instance), such a story would have been attractive precisely because impossible and unnecessary to verify or falsify. The *myth* of a massive, foundational, consensus-constituting bestseller would, in other words, have done just as much work for the memory of founding as an actual bestseller would have done.

Besides *Common Sense*, the only other text in the early American canon that has been fetishized with the word “bestseller” is Susanna Rowson's 1791 *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth* (later reprinted under the title *Charlotte Temple*). The archival evidence for this novel's popularity is impressive, for although it was originally published in England, *Charlotte Temple* was immensely popular in the early United States after its first North American appearance in 1793. As Cathy Davidson has shown, there were 42 editions before 1820, issued in 17 different cities. Indeed, the story and its characters were popular enough that in 1818, the town of Columbus, Ohio (then considered frontier country) erected a waxworks show featuring the leading figures of the novel. More impressive than how many copies the book sold is who it sold to. *Charlotte's* demographics defy the gendered boundaries critics have long assumed for sentimental fiction: it was read by men, women, and children and was, Davidson notes, especially popular in families – frequently given as a gift, for example, between parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters. This seemingly universal appeal across gender and age boundaries is visible in the many material forms the book took. Its different editions, like its readers, were various. It appeared in newsprint versions that targeted less affluent readers; in editions decked with ornate bindings and illustrations for wealthier readers; in primers intended to teach young girls how to read; and in toy (miniature) pictorial versions targeting pre-literate children.

Why was the book so popular in the US? As Davidson suggests, *Charlotte Temple* lent itself to the needs of its readers, migrating from audience to audience and reader to reader as plasticly as Charlotte herself, in the novel, migrates from her parents to her teachers and finally to her lover. Charlotte's story works equally well, in fact, as a collective allegory or as a personal life-story, teetering productively on the borderline between the communal ethos of republicanism and the more individualistic ethos of the coming liberal order. Indeed, the novel describes problems that people were encountering both as a group (throughout the nation) and in their daily lives as individuals, making it ripe for both public and private use.

On the national level, the story still remains powerful today as a post-Revolutionary allegory of the type Jay Fliegelman explores in *Prodigals and Pilgrims*. There, Fliegelman describes the potent ways in which seduction narratives resonated with popular public discourse regarding the condition of the disobedient colonies, which were frequently troped as either wayward children or women seduced by Revolution. Indeed, the trope of political seduction actually gained power after the Revolution, as newly national elites sought to install a familial hierarchy that placed themselves at the top and the populace (or more common people) at the bottom. As John Adams famously noted in 1804, "Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa . . . The artful villain will pursue the innocent lovely girl to her ruin and her death." In such formulations, elites represented themselves as the "head" of the body politic while the people at large were troped as the "heart" – an emotional metaphor that clearly reverberates with the feminized and infantilized sentimental heroines of seduction novels like *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, and of course, *Charlotte Temple*.

But how is *Charlotte Temple*, a novel first published in London and partially set in England, actually a story about America? As critics like Fliegelman, Gillian Beer, Davidson, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg have suggested, the problem of *Charlotte Temple* is the problem of one's ability to consent. The novel explores the problem of discretion versus inclination (or duty versus desire), and in doing so it reveals this conflict to be a problem faced by everyone (politically speaking) in the newly formed republic. Yet at the more individual, or personal, level, Charlotte's story is also the Benjamin Franklin story reversed. *Charlotte Temple* is an anti-*Autobiography*, with a main character who, quite unlike Franklin, never grows up, failing to successfully achieve the circuit from child to adult and from dependence to independence. While Franklin emerges to become a world-historical figure, Charlotte does not even manage to survive. As Ann Douglas has pointed out, Charlotte dies a child. In this way, Charlotte's popularity suggests a different social trajectory for readers to identify with – something other than the famous rags to riches story that would later be established by Franklin. Indeed, even though Franklin appears (in Part Two of the *Autobiography*) to make his "method" for self-perfection and worldly success available to every one of his readers, many people clearly found a more identifiable template for their lives in Charlotte, who epitomizes the downwardly mobile damage produced by Revolution, rather than the more familiar hagiographic Franklinian trajectory.

Charlotte's anti-Franklinian credentials are developed through two character foils. The first of these is perfectly transparent: the aptly named Julia Franklin, who is described as an "independent" girl of spirit and means, "the very reverse of Charlotte Temple." The other is Charlotte's mother, Lucy Temple, who is offered up as the model woman because she obeys her father and later her husband in ways that make her an exact contradiction of the rebel Franklin, whose inaugural act of manhood looks exactly like Charlotte's – filial defiance, followed by a long journey on a boat to a new home. Lucy Temple is, quite unlike either Franklin or Charlotte, always one to "cheerfully submit," gladly taking up the "submissive duty of the wife" and daughter.

Quite unlike her mother, however, Charlotte disobeys, and her first act of disobedience is, not coincidentally, an act of reading: having received a letter from a mysterious soldier-suitor, she hesitates to open it herself until a corrupt (French) tutor eggs her on to it: “Prithee open the letter, read it, and judge for yourself.” This message to “judge for yourself” recalls the opening lines of *The Federalist* – and many similar political essays and pamphlets – which explicitly addressed “the People” through the use of direct address, which in the case of *The Federalist* turns into the equivalent of a civic dare: “You are called upon to deliberate on a new Constitution for the United States of America,” Publius writes, noting that it has “been reserved to the people of this country . . . to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.”

Though Charlotte shares Franklin’s rebelliousness, she does not share his fate, and her anti-Franklinian credentials ought to alert us once again to the intensely gendered nature of Franklin’s fantasy of disembodiment. Yet *Charlotte Temple*, both in its plot and in its wide reception history, should also point us back to Paine and reveal the intensely gendered nature of our own cultural fantasy about *Common Sense*. Though we continue to believe as a culture that “everyone” read *Common Sense*, it is quite clear that “everyone” did not. There is no doubt, for example, that the likes of Charlotte Temple did not.

4. The Post-National Republic

In the end, there is really only one truly dominant form in the new republic – and that is the nation form. Regardless of what texts are added or dropped from the canon of early American letters, the field continues to agree that the work of politics and nation-building is the central cultural work of this period. The problem with this framing paradigm is that when we make something as vast and collective as the nation the primary unit of meaning for an entire field, we force ourselves to generalize (and hence erase) a radical scene of difference – and in the case of the early United States, that is a formidable and ideologically vexing task. It’s little wonder that historians of the book have been so skeptical about developing any one generalized thesis about early American book culture. As David Hall warns, “no one generalization” can encompass “everyone who lived in British America” (Hall and Hench, 1987: 378). Yet because of the special pressure placed on this period as formatively national, such generalization does in fact continue to be the stock in trade of most work done in this field. And no matter how radical and reconstructive such work aims to be, it does the bidding of the form it seeks to critique whenever it thinks monolithically, generally, foundationally – in short, nationally – about the many forms and readers that peppered the actual landscape of late eighteenth-century North America.

New work in the field points to at least a partial solution to this conundrum – a solution that is neither nation-centered nor necessarily print-centered. In new work

being produced by Pat Crain, Andrew Doolen, Paul Gilje, David Kazanjian, Laura Rigal, Ed White, and many others, the nation recedes and new political, material, and aesthetic formations are emerging to take its place. No doubt the next generation of early American scholars will move us away from the canon as we know it and the nation that its books and its myths of early mass diffusion and universal cultural consumption still prop up. Long live the post-national republic, and all the books its many peoples never read.

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“Indians” Constructed and Speaking

Scott Richard Lyons

All literary and cultural traditions are formed in social contexts that are political to the root. The social contexts of indigenous peoples living in North America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were defined by the politics of colonization: conquest, war, ethnic cleansing, military surveillance, forced assimilation and cultural repression, as well as the forces of racism and poverty. Yet even during those turbulent years, Native people had reason to believe that their futures could be improved and acted accordingly. After all, the United States of America had signed treaties reserving a sense of indigenous national autonomy, advocacy groups had formed to protest the unjust treatment of Native peoples, and a new class of indigenous writers, orators, and intellectuals emerged to speak out against the cruelties of colonialism and in favor of Indian rights. While the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were politically a mixed bag for Native peoples, it was nonetheless within this historical crucible that the cultural enterprise we now call Native American literature was formed.

Native literature is no less “Indian” than any other indigenous cultural tradition – e.g., the more immediately recognizable oral traditions of myth and ceremony – though it usually speaks in the language of the colonizer, refers to the ideas of other peoples, and even sometimes resembles the logic of the dominant culture. To the contrary, the Native American literary tradition is precisely an Indian cultural tradition insofar as it shares with other indigenous practices a single overarching concern: to express the humanity of Native people. This may come as some surprise (or disappointment) to readers expecting to find exotic cultural differences in Native texts, or who might be startled to discover that many Indian writers and speakers have been devout Christians. Can so obvious a feature of imperialism as Christian discourse be considered an indigenous cultural tradition? Insofar as it seeks to express the humanity of Native people, the answer must be yes. All cultures change in response to their historical environments; all cultures are complicated, contested, and even contradictory. Unless we wish to suspend indigenous cultures in the past, distinguish “authentic” Indian expressions from others, and exclude large swaths of the Native population simply

because they might appear "inauthentic" – for example, the hundreds of thousands of indigenous Christians living today – we must assume that any discourse that purports to express Native humanity can be taken as constitutive of an indigenous cultural tradition. This general rule should hold as true for poems and political tracts as it does for prayers with the pipe of peace.

This chapter explores the development of that cultural tradition known as American Indian literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To properly comprehend the social contexts of this period, we must ask some important historical questions. First, what was happening politically with Native peoples, especially in the realms of policymaking? Second, what were the dominant images of Native people during those years? Finally, what were the major themes and concerns of Native writers and orators, and how were they addressed? As we shall see, Native writers and orators employed complex rhetorical strategies to represent Native humanity – a task whose ultimate objective was to intervene in the public sphere and influence policymaking – and they did it in social contexts that were more often than not dehumanizing.

History and Policy

Colonialism came to Native America in stages. Its first formation was a nearly three hundred year period of cross-cultural engagement – including "discovery," conquest, and treaty making – and it all began with a misnomer. It was Columbus himself who first called the inhabitants of North America "Indians," thus setting into motion a powerful and longstanding practice of defining Native people in European terms. When Columbus arrived, there were over five hundred distinct indigenous nations north of the Rio Grande, speaking hundreds of tongues from over fifty language families (by contrast, European languages represented only three language families: Indo-European, Finno-Ugric, and Basque). All of that cultural and linguistic diversity was reduced with the invention of a single moniker; "Indians" have struggled to reclaim the terms of self-definition ever since.

The first stage of colonization featured the important practice of treaty making. Treaties between Indian and European nations (and later America) established a sense of mutual recognition and equality between peoples that continues to govern relations today. Treaties exist because European colonizers took their political cues from the great Spanish theologian Francisco de Vitoria, who in 1532 proclaimed that Indians of the New World were the rightful owners of their lands and thus required diplomacy by treaty. Vitoria's doctrine established a sense of indigenous political independence and land rights that was reinforced for centuries to come, not only because of its presumed divine mandate but even more so through the material practice of hundreds of treaty signings across America. Treaties are the primary historical reason why American Indians today possess a recognized degree of autonomy, while not all of the world's indigenous do.

Treaties lent a sense of propriety and legitimacy to colonialism, as they insisted upon respect between peoples and sought to establish peaceful relations. As a result, and despite the occasional outbreak of war, for three centuries dealings between Indians and Europeans were more civil than what would eventually come to pass. After the Revolutionary War, the right to make treaties with Indian nations was assumed by the fledgling United States, who benefitted diplomatically from the practice. Since no nation can be said to officially exist until formally recognized by other nations, treaties signed with indigenous nations helped legitimate the United States in the eyes of the international community. For the next century and a half, the Americans made over six hundred treaties and agreements with Indians and established themselves as a sovereign nation in the process. When the legitimacy of the United States was no longer in question, the practice of treaty making was stopped through an 1871 act that henceforth mandated the use of the word “agreement” instead of “treaty,” although the nature of the former did not differ in kind from the latter.

But by then America had already moved into colonialism’s second stage: the removal era. Today the policy of removal would be called ethnic cleansing, and it constituted a substantial departure from the beliefs of the treaty era. The removal era was set into motion by three US Supreme Court cases concerning the Cherokee Nation that were argued between 1823 and 1832. In these cases Chief Justice John Marshall designated the Cherokee, with whom the United States had already established treaties, a “domestic dependent nation”: not quite foreign in nature, although higher than states in terms of sovereignty. The Removal Act was passed into law in 1830, paving the infamous Trail of Tears on which over one-fourth of the Cherokee population died. During the 1830s, thousands of Indians were forcibly walked from their ancestral territories to uncertain fates in new lands, where the topography, flora and fauna were not only unfamiliar but things their languages sometimes lacked words to describe.

The removal era was as harmful to Indian peoples as any other ethnic cleansing program, and it did not solve problems between whites and indigenous. It exacerbated them. As westward expansion increased in force, and settlers continued to encroach upon Indian lands, wars broke out between Natives resisting occupation and whites seeking the new lands and lives promised by their government. Under increasingly militarized conditions, “reservations” were created and administered like camps, with soldiers guarding the perimeters and agents entrusted with the care of their Indian “wards.” Missionaries descended upon reservations to convert the Natives and sometimes ended up preaching back to the whites against the many injustices they found in Indian country. The early reservation years were among the darkest Native peoples had ever known, and they started with removal and its unilateral usurpation of indigenous sovereignty.

It wasn’t long before Indians were no longer viewed as the obstacles to white settlement they once were; by the latter half of the nineteenth century, a greater concern was what to do with dispossessed Natives living on reservations. Since reservations were both an economic drain and a moral quandary, a third policy era was born as an attractive solution to the “Indian problem”: assimilation. There were two general means by

which assimilation was pursued. First, off-reservation boarding schools and reservation day schools were established. Developed by a retired military officer and operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the boarding schools sought to "kill the Indian and save the man" through cultural, linguistic, and physical immersion. Children were taken from their communities and placed in schools far away, forbidden from speaking their languages, given Euro-American clothing, and provided with an education designed to assimilate them into white, Christian America. While the boarding school system and its presuppositions would be considered anathema to human rights advocates today – indeed, the project would be illegal according to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide – it is important to remember that this "education for extinction" was actually the brainchild of liberals. Political conservatives of the day generally agitated for more direct forms of genocide through military means – Indian annihilation – so the boarding schools were considered a humanitarian endeavor.

Even broader in scope were the allotment acts – e.g., the General Allotment Act (also called the Dawes Act) of 1887 – passed at the end of the nineteenth century. "Allotment" referred to the creation of private property on tribal lands; it intended to assimilate Natives by creating a new class of farmers who, once given a taste of private property and profit, would supposedly become ambitious capitalists. Allotment had the additional attraction of creating "surplus tracts," which were immediately put to use by timber barons, land speculators, and the US government. As a result of allotment, between the years 1887 and 1934, when the policy was abandoned, tribal landholdings within the United States were reduced from 138 million to 48 million acres. Another product of allotment was the "checkerboarding" of Indian reservations, as non-Natives acquired Indian lands through purchase or other means. Allotment thus not only reduced the amount of land an Indian nation possessed; it also weakened tribal national integrity, since Americans were now their immediate neighbors yet living under American laws.

While allotment and the boarding schools were intended to assimilate Indians, what they really did was fragment the borders between Indians and whites – the borders of land, language, and psyche – creating not assimilated Indians so much as cultural schizophrenia and political conflict in Indian country. Allotment led to land loss, boundary disputes, and jurisdictional confusion. The boarding schools produced childless communities and graduates who often found it difficult, if not altogether impossible, to socially reintegrate back home. The assimilation era continued until the 1930s, when the United States embarked on a new policy of self-determination for Indian peoples. But the results of history are not quickly erased with the stroke of a pen. Colonization had taken its toll, and the remainder of the twentieth century was devoted to rebuilding what had been disfigured or lost during the eras of removal and assimilation.

Today, with the benefit of hindsight, the effects of American colonization policy seem clear: from treaties, to removal, to assimilation, the general trajectory was to reduce the political status of indigenous nations and subordinate Native people to

American rule. In the beginning, “Indians” were invented but also viewed as nations deserving the respect of others in a nation-to-nation relationship. In the removal period, Indian nations were redefined as “domestic dependent nations” and given over to ethnic cleansing programs. By the time of the assimilation era, Natives were seen as little more than poor, pathetic, “vanishing” individuals in need of rapid assimilation into the American mainstream; their lands were allotted and children sent to boarding schools. Yet despite this history of systemic disempowerment, it cannot be said that indigenous sovereignty was ever extinguished. If it were, there would be no tribal nations left in existence today. And yet there are.

Image and Idea

Indian colonization policies were always driven by ideas and images of Indianness that were neither accurate nor favorable to Natives. They weren’t always negative – sometimes the Indian was romanticized to the point of glorification – but a positive stereotype can be as reductive and immobilizing as any other. Circulated in several textual venues, from philosophical discourse to literary representation to scientific racial theory, the image of the Indian was persistently governed by the binary opposition of savagism/civilization. “Savages” were people who lacked “civilization,” the latter signified by certain laws, letters, technologies, and a true religion. Civilized folk, by contrast, were those who had escaped the primeval bondage of savagery and become enlightened, thus more fully human. There was no sense of cultural relativism in this Manichean world divided between savage and civilized, only the question of what the civilized should do with the savages they found all around them.

In his great 1953 study, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, Roy Harvey Pearce distinguished three variants of thought regarding Indian savages, each of them in sync with the policy shifts that defined colonization. First, up until the American Revolution – the treaty period – Pearce found groups like the Puritans describing Indians as evil but essentially the same as other humans, that is, possessing a human soul capable of both sin and salvation. The Puritan goal was to change Indians by uplifting them out of savagery and into godly civilization. After the birth of America, Indians became seen as obstacles to the westward advance of civilization. This view, the ideology of removal, produced images of Natives as steadfast in their savagery, thus stubborn social problems. Finally, as the removal period gave way to the assimilation era, Indians were described as tragic figures incapable of civilization and destined to vanish. The social objective at that point was to save those few who might be successfully assimilated, like Indian children, and mourn the rest who by fate and fact of savagery appeared headed for the ashcan of history.

Some of the earliest depictions of Indian savages were the captivity narratives of the colonial period. Captivity narratives were extremely popular memoirs of white people, typically women, who were captured by Indians but somehow managed to survive and tell their harrowing tales. These tales were filled with plenty of blood, guts, and sexual

tension – the constant threat of rape – and their intentions were religiously didactic. As exemplified by the most famous of the genre, *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), captivity narratives proclaimed that only God could protect a captive woman from the threats of evil Indian savagery:

O the wonderful power of God that I have seen, and the experience that I have had. I have been in the midst of those roaring lions, and savage bears, that feared neither God, nor man, nor the devil, by night and day, alone and in company, sleeping all sorts together, and yet not one of them ever offered me the least abuse of unchastity to me, in word or action. Though some are ready to say I speak it for my own credit; but I speak it in the presence of God, and to His Glory.

(Rowlandson, 1853: 47)

Here Indians are depicted as “roaring lions” and “savage bears” that slept together in a manner that scandalized Rowlandson (and doubtless her readers). Rowlandson’s Indians were associated with nature, ferocity, godlessness, sexuality, immorality, and the terrifying unknown; but virtue and faith could keep a decent woman safe in their midst. Captivity narratives did feature the occasional appearance of “good” Indians, but these figures made sense only because they were cast against a backdrop of “bad” Indians whose savagery was unquestioned. But Rowlandson didn’t think Indians unchangeable; to the contrary, Puritan savages were ignoble but always subject to conversion.

It wasn’t until the eighteenth century that the “noble” variety of savage was born. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality among Men* (1754), noble savages were people living in the “state of nature” who did not know good from evil, like Adam and Eve before the Fall, yet the “peacefulness of their passions, and their ignorance of vice” kept them independent and pure. Rousseau’s noble savages reversed the Puritan logic – savages were now good and civilization bad – but did not question the binary opposition itself. While the noble savage might seem an improvement from Rowlandson’s time, it is difficult to conclude that any savage image is beneficial to the people upon whom it is imposed. Good or bad, noble or ignoble, a savage is still essentially inhuman. Associated with nature, devoid of reason, driven by animalistic or childlike urges, and above all separate from civilized life, a savage romanticized might be portrayed in softer hues, but the basic idea is no less dehumanizing.

As the treaty period gave way to the removal era, and Indians were increasingly viewed as obstructions to westward expansion, some white writers foreshadowed Indian policies. Lydia Sigourney’s *Traits of the Aborigines of America* (1822), a poem featuring no fewer than 102 pages of notes about Native culture, unfavorably contrasted whites to Indians but also suggested that the latter were perhaps a little less noble than originally thought. Describing atrocities witnessed on both sides of the Indian wars, Sigourney advocated assimilation and Christianization for Natives in an effort to save them from the degradations of both savagery and unscrupulous whites:

Oh! Make these foes
 Your friends, your brethren, give them the mild arts
 Social and civiliz'd, send them that Book
 Which teaches to forgive, implant the faith
 That turns the raging vulture to the dove
 And with these deathless bonds secure the peace
 And welfare of your babes.

(*Canto Fifth*, lines 567–73)

Sigourney's Indians were decent but deprived people in need of help – humans, but social problems – thus signaling a turn in thought about Indians. Sigourney's Natives were being killed primarily because they were not noble savages, so assimilation presented itself as a humanitarian alternative to genocide, war, and removal.

It wasn't long before Indians were described in romanticized heroic fashion, as worthy enemies now vanquished but no less admired for their character. By midcentury some had become American mythologies. Longfellow's *Hiawatha* (1855) placed the Indian in America's idyllic past as a primitive commentator speaking sage wisdom. Loosely based on scholarly collections of Indian mythologies – although Longfellow clearly took liberties and got a lot of it wrong – *Hiawatha* was so noble he nearly transcended savagery. Accuracy wasn't the point. Longfellow's Indian was an American nationalist legend; he forged it by emptying the figure of the Indian of everything unpleasantly savage, accentuating the nobility, then mythologizing “the first American” into a new creation story. In this way, *Hiawatha* became America's first Indian mascot.

But the most powerful and lasting images of Indians created during the nineteenth century were certainly those fashioned by James Fenimore Cooper, whose imagery generated ideas about Indians that persist yet today. His work suggested that there were two basic kinds of Indians – noble savages and bloodthirsty savages – and these constituted the primary differences between tribes. The noble ones, so regally portrayed by Chingachgook and Uncas, were men to be admired but also the “last” of their people: vanishing Indians. Finally, Cooper's Natives were loyal sidekicks to white frontiersmen who always seemed a bit better at being Indian than Indians themselves. In short, Cooper's Indians were idealized, vanishing, and subordinate to whites. Why? Like Longfellow, Cooper sought to establish an American mythology, one that would rid his national culture of British influences – for instance, replacing aristocracy with new forms of natural leadership – so his Indian characters weren't about Indians *per se* but rather what Americans should and should not emulate. Cooper's imagery served the project of American nationalism, and along with it colonialism, so the images were less referential than ideological. Cooper's work was a literary send-off to the Indian and an introduction of “native” Americans to themselves: an imperialist fantasy, even to the point of assuaging white guilt about the treatment that real Indians were receiving at the time.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, it was clear that many whites had learned the lessons of their literary masters. First, they knew that Indians were savage,

noble or otherwise, and that savagery was inherent. The development of racial science (a.k.a. "scientific racism"), which created elaborate taxonomies of innate racial differences and then ranked the races' capacities for civilization, provided a powerful justification for this view. Second, they knew that Indians were vanishing, because civilization could not coexist with savagery. This was tragic but was no less justified, since the white race had Manifest Destiny on its side (and thanks to racial differences, in its blood). Finally, they knew that the deadly federal policies enacted in Indian country were unfortunate, yes, but also unpreventable, and ultimately the Indians' own fault. They knew it, because they knew Indians. They had read all about them in books.

Indians Speaking for Themselves

One reason for the survival of indigenous nations in these damaging historical contexts of policy, idea, and image – the combination of which would seem to spell doom for any social group – was the stubborn persistence of Indian intellectuals, writers, and orators who argued for the human rights of Native people. These intellectuals wrote autobiographies, tribal histories, travel narratives, protest literature, and fiery Christian sermons. As the nineteenth century progressed, some produced novels and poetry. Tribal newspapers were established, starting with Elias Boudinot's *Cherokee Phoenix* in the 1820s (and since then no fewer than 200 tribal newspapers have come and gone; the *Phoenix* is still published today). As a group, indigenous intellectuals created a rhetorical and cultural movement charged with the task of confronting the ideologies of colonization – images of steadfast savagery, notions of Indian inferiority and vanishment, the logics of racism and genocide – all the while demonstrating an ability to "progress." They had to express, and visibly embody themselves, the humanity of Indians in the daunting, dangerous contexts of American colonialism.

The first to speak in this environment was the Mohegan missionary Samson Occom, whose *Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul* (1772) became a runaway hit. Occom had already made a notable public impression with his religious confession, *A Short Narrative of My Life* (1768), in which he resisted the stereotype of savagery simply by appearing eminently civilized, educated, religious, and concerned with the public good. His rhetorical style prefigured much of the discourse to come from Native Christians, as he preached against sin and for conversion in the usual way of most ministers; but he also criticized racism and, if implicitly, the grim effects of colonization. *Moses Paul* was a classic execution sermon offering an additional condemnation of alcohol, which was introduced by whites and afflicting Native communities. His *Short Narrative* was an account of Occom's life and conversion but also questioned the fact that he was paid less than white preachers. These subtle, sermonic critiques of injustice marked Occom's texts as something more than merely Christian. His challenging perspectives, subjects addressed, and defensive concern for the welfare of his people set into motion what we might call a critical Native voice.

But make no mistake; it was also a Christian voice. It is important to acknowledge that Christianity was an attractive discourse to many Indians living under conditions of colonialism, as it offered a hopeful message of equality that challenged the decidedly unequal society in which they lived. While some Native leaders and orators explicitly rejected Christianity – perhaps most famously Segoyewatha/Red Jacket (Seneca) and Petalesharo (Pawnee), both of whom gave well-attended public addresses on the subject – many Indians respected the religion of the whites. Some found in Christianity a manifestation of the divine comparable to their own systems of belief, not (as is more common today) an “imperialist ideology.” As Charles Alexander Eastman (Dakota) suggested in *The Soul of the Indian* (1911), Christianity was often deemed less of a threat to Natives than the hypocrisy of whites who espoused Christian beliefs but then oppressed people. However Native speakers might have personally viewed the religion, clearly Christianity’s message of universal brotherhood, justice, and love provided them with a powerful rhetorical platform from which to argue for social change.

So both Christian discourses and Christian Indians proliferated during the nineteenth century, and they sought to promote Native interests. Take, for example, the righteous religious critiques of the Pequot missionary William Apess, whose *A Son of the Forest* (1829) was the first autobiographical text written by an Indian without the help of a translator or editor. This text, along with *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequod Tribe* (1833), demonstrated how an Indian was not only a complex human being, but also a person with the ability to convert, thus change. Apess’s depictions of Indian conversions countered dominant notions of savagery being a permanent condition. *Experiences* also featured the remarkable essay, “An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man,” which was an early critique of racism. “Looking Glass” wielded religious discourse against racism: “Is not religion the same now under a colored skin as it ever was? If so, I would ask, why is not a man of color respected?”

Apess’s own answer to the question of racial respect had nothing to do with “race” itself – perhaps in quiet resistance to scientific racism, he didn’t even use the word – but instead pointed to culture and social habit, for example, the stereotype of the bloodthirsty savage. Three years later, in *Eulogy on King Philip* (1836), Apess addressed the persistence of such stereotypes in a personal story showing how they worked in his own life and laying the blame for racism at the feet of the Pilgrims and their progeny:

About two years ago, I called at an inn in Lexington; and a gentleman present, not spying me to be an Indian, began to say they ought to be exterminated. I took it up in our defense, though not boisterous but coolly; and when we came to retire, finding that I was an Indian, he was unwilling to sleep opposite my room for fear of being murdered before morning. We presume his conscience pled guilty. These things I mention to show that the doctrines of the Pilgrims have grown up with the people.

(*On Our Own Ground*, 1992: 305)

Here we find a number of issues that Apess and other Native writers and orators faced. First, white people were openly voicing opinions about Indian extermination. Second,

whites employed and believed stereotypical images of bloodthirsty savages, even to the point of fearing murder at the hands of one with whom one had just "coolly" argued. But, third, this "doctrine of the Pilgrims" was not so entrenched as to prevent the emergence of a guilty conscience. Apess banked on the hope that white Americans could be persuaded to act justly and so appealed to their sense of Christian morality.

Apess was successful as a speaker and writer in part because his own compelling personality and obvious talent put the lie to notions of Indian inferiority. But he also used all of the rhetorical weapons he had at his disposal, including Christian discourse. Interestingly, Apess also employed the language of indigenous sovereignty that one more frequently encounters today. Written during the height of the removal period, *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Mashpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained* (1835) described his experiences helping the Mashpees seek control of their own resources and resist the tyranny of a Massachusetts-appointed "overseer." The Mashpees issued an "Indian Declaration of Independence," most likely authored by Apess, proclaiming that "we, as a tribe, will rule ourselves, and have the right to do so; for all men are born free and equal, says the Constitution of the country." Using the language of American democracy to agitate for rights became a time-honored rhetorical strategy for social justice movements, from the abolitionists to 1970s civil rights groups, but Apess's use of the argument was surely one of the first.

The removal era was ideologically wedded to images of Indians being steadfast in their savagery and obstacles to civilized progress, so it was crucial for writers and orators like Apess and Ocom to work against such notions. But removal also posed a threat to indigenous cultural integrity, as removed peoples faced the distinct possibility of forgetting where they came from. In order to demonstrate the humanity of Native people while simultaneously preserving traditional knowledge, tribal histories were written. David Cusick (Tuscarora) wrote the first, *Sketches of the Ancient History of the Six Nations* (1827), emphasizing the value of Haudenosaunee culture and government. Ojibwes followed suit with histories that oscillated between ethnological portraits and political arguments. George Copway's *Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation* (1850) recorded traditional stories and sentimentally depicted the practices of everyday life. Peter Jones's *History of the Ojibway Indians* (1861) featured analyses of the Ojibwe language. William Whipple Warren wrote the popular *History of the Ojibway, Based on Traditions and Oral Statements* (1885) before being elected to the Minnesota state legislature. These histories and others – e.g., by Peter Dooyentate Clarke (Wyandot), Elias Johnson (Tuscarora), and Andrew Blackbird (Odawa) – sought to preserve the past but can also be interpreted as portraying the humanity of Indians facing the inhuman threat of removal. Focusing on such matters as language, culture, child-rearing, traditional government, stories, and other details of Indian life, writers of tribal histories weren't trying to capture a last-minute snapshot of a "vanishing race" so much as depicting the human condition in Indian country. Even their use of the word "history" was an argument for Native humanity.

As the removal period turned into the assimilation era, and Indians were increasingly represented as both tragic and vanishing, Native intellectuals produced hybrid

autobiographies that combined different discourses into an indigenous pastiche. Copway's *Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-gah-bowb* (1847) and *Traditional History* blended myth, history, memoir and personal reflection into a poetic political argument. Copway's work described Ojibwe life in endearing tones intended to counter images of steadfast savagery, as we see in his autobiography:

I was born in nature's wide domain! The trees were all that sheltered my infant limbs – the blue heavens all that covered me. I am one of Nature's children; I have always admired her; she shall be my glory; her features . . . contribute to my enduring love of her; and whenever I see her, emotions of pleasure roll in my breast, and well and burst like waves on the shores of the ocean, in prayer and praise to Him who has placed me in her hand . . .

(Copway, 1847: 16)

Here we encounter a speaker who is neither vanishing nor tragic; God has, in fact, placed him in Nature's hand. Of course, nineteenth-century readers would have already had it in mind that Indians were "Nature's children," so to a certain extent Copway reinforced stereotype. But coming from an educated, articulate Indian, saturated with pastoral Romantic imagery, and invoking God, such language could be used to counter more egregiously negative stereotypes of bloodthirsty, tragic, or vanishing savages. In a way, Copway wielded stereotype against itself in an effort to portray Native humanity through the example of his life story: a tale that wasn't only about him but his Ojibwe people.

Copway also used his texts as occasions for making explicit policy proposals, a practice that became common among Native writers during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Having forged a direct link between Indians, the natural world (Native lands), and the will of the Almighty, Copway's *Traditional History* made a moral argument for assimilation:

Education and Christianity are to the Indian what wings are to the eagle; they elevate him; and these given to him by men of right views of existence enable him to rise above the soil of degradation, and hover about the high mounts of wisdom and truth.

(Copway, 1850: vii–viii)

Why assimilation? For readers new to this literature, Indian intellectuals' embrace of assimilation policy will probably be as startling as their ubiquitous Christianity. We offer no explanation but this: assimilation was deemed a far more palatable fate than removal or genocide. The latter half of the nineteenth century was, from the Native point of view, incredibly frightening. Ethnic cleansing had proceeded apace, reservations felt like prisons, Indian resistance was forcefully put down, whites were openly advocating genocide, and military massacres had created terror in Indian country. In this frightening political context – perhaps symbolized most powerfully by the 1862 public hanging of 38 Dakota war prisoners in Mankato, Minnesota, America's largest mass execution – assimilation made sense as a survival strategy. It may have seemed

the only viable option to an actual Indian "vanishment," and Native people's best shot at equality and human rights.

Copway wasn't alone in his advocacy of assimilation. A similarly hybrid text that made the argument was Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins's *Life Among the Piutes* (1883), a fiery blend of memoir, history, and political treatise chronicling relations between her nation and the Americans during the mid-nineteenth century. Hopkins was an advocate of allotment and eventually founded a Western-style school. Yet she too used her book to tell the story of her people, critique American policy, and, as we see here, audaciously reveal the power held by Paiute women under traditional governance:

The women know as much as the men do, and their advice is often asked. We have a republic as well as you. The council-tent is our Congress, and anybody can speak who has anything to say, women and all. They are always interested in what their husbands are doing and thinking about. And they take some part even in the wars . . . If women could go into your Congress, I think justice would soon be done to the Indians.

(Winnemucca, 1994: 53)

Hopkins made several points in her writing about Paiute women. She showed that traditional Native society before colonization was not only fully functional but democratic; it was progressive, granting equality to women. Further, white women, many of whom were busy forming social justice movements of their own, had something politically in common with Indians and should act on it. And, finally, since one powerful stereotype of the assimilation era was the notion that Native men disrespected and abused women – a belief we can trace back to Rowlandson's time – Hopkins's writing resisted one of savagism's most persistent themes. In sum, *Life Among the Piutes* countered stereotypes, represented Native democracy, critiqued American colonialism and sexism, and sought coalitions with other oppressed groups, in addition to representing Indian life.

After Hopkins, Indian critiques of white injustices would increasingly beg the question, who's the real "savage" here? Still, the nineteenth century closed with Native intellectuals arguing for assimilation, and they got it. In what we might take to be an unintended consequence of assimilation policy, the early twentieth century witnessed the formation of America's first pan-Indian advocacy organization, the Society of American Indians (SAI), comprised of the first generation of Indians raised under assimilation policies. Founded in 1911, SAI featured such prominent intellectuals as Charles Alexander Eastman (Dakota), Zitkala-Sa (Lakota), Francis La Flesche (Omaha), Arthur C. Parker (Seneca), Carlos Montezuma (Apache), J.N.B. Hewitt (Tuscarora), and others. SAI sponsored conferences, lobbied Congress, issued position papers, wrote newsletters, and served as a professional launching pad for writers, orators, and civic leaders. SAI was notable as well for setting into motion the practice of forming large advocacy organizations, like today's National Congress of American Indians, to agitate for Indian interests. It also testified to the fact that Columbus's "Indians" had finally come into existence: SAI was above all a pan-indigenous, "American Indian" organization.

We close with SAI because it was largely through their work that a significant turn in Indian policy – from assimilation to self-determination – was achieved in the 1930s. This is not to suggest that Eastman, Parker, Hewitt, or any other affiliated intellectual was singularly instrumental in heroically attaining Indian victories; nor is it to lionize the specific positions they took, many of which (e.g., their advocacy of US citizenship for Natives) might seem compromised today. If anything, the story of American Indian writers living under colonialism – from the treaty era to removal to assimilation – is a tale of people making the best calls they could under extremely dehumanizing and discursively limited conditions of life. SAI represents an endpoint in that rhetorical and cultural history. And they did some important work. Like Occom and Apess, SAI writers combated stereotypes each time they took to the stage or the page; like Copway and Hopkins, they advocated certain policy positions that might now appear misguided, but in their own day – when realistic options were few in number – seemed protective and progressive. In the final analysis, however, perhaps SAI's greatest legacy was simply the way they organized themselves into a committed, thoughtful, and talented pan-Indian group and publicly demanded something better for their people.

They did it, of course, through words. One of SAI's most exemplary writers was Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), best known for her rich autobiographical essays published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1901–2; republished in 1921 as *American Indian Stories*). Filled with vivid imagery, powerful emotion, relentless critique, and stark personal revelation, Zitkala-Sa's autobiography offered the world one of its most damning critiques of colonization to date, employing a modernist aesthetic saturated with images of alienation and spiritual emptiness:

For the white man's papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother's simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed. Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God.

(Zitkala-Sa, 2003: 12)

This passage might be read as emblematic of the ways many early twentieth-century Natives felt: lonely, angry, stripped of meaning and identity, and lacking connections to the world. It was a portrait of the modern Indian that colonization hath wrought.

But she didn't rest there, and neither would those who followed in her wake. Zitkala-Sa concluded her story of alienation and loss with a hopeful portrayal of a new Indian vision, one that might guide her through the precarious political mazes of the new world and signal the energies of indigenous cultural and political resurgence to come:

I seemed to hope a day would come when my mute aching head, reared upward to the sky, would flash a zigzag lightning across the heavens. With this dream of vent for a long-pent consciousness, I walked again amid the crowds.

(Zitkala-Sa, 2003: 12)

She became a public intellectual, a warrior of the pen, a *critic*. No longer would the Indian story be told in exclusively non-Native terms; no longer would others construct "Indians" in an uncontested imperialist idiom. The world would henceforth reckon with the voice of a people who had survived a holocaust. Indians would speak for themselves. Such is, perhaps, the most we can ask of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Native literature, that problematic but powerful indigenous cultural tradition.

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Sentiment and Style

Tara Penry

Like Hallmark cards and Disney movies in our own day, sentimental cultural texts abounded in America during the nineteenth century. From temperance tracts to melodramas, deathbed daguerreotypes to tombstone etchings, the genres of sentimental discourse reached well beyond the sphere of the literary. Yet in verse, prose sketches, novels, and other established literary genres of the nineteenth century, sentimentalism left clear traces, though it produced no theorist – like realism’s Howells or modernism’s Pound – to analyze, articulate, and legitimize for posterity the motives and methods of sentimental literary expression. This analytical and theoretical work has been left to latter-day critics, who use the term “sentimental” to designate a body of texts and cultural practices that privilege emotional relationships and rhetoric, especially relations and rhetorics of sympathy that purport to redeem or console.

In widest circulation and reaching its greatest complexity of tone and style during the 1840s and 1850s, sentimentalism figured prominently in the American literary landscape between the eighteenth century, with its optimistic faith in individual reason, and the twentieth, when the modernist movement dismissed popular and affective expression and the work of women writers (presumably more emotional than men) to the ranks of subliterature. During the intervening century, in the midst of what critic Shirley Samuels has called a “culture of sentiment,” the utopian promise of human sympathy provided a unifying principle and premise across disciplines such as religion, moral philosophy, politics, social reform, education, and even medicine. In this context, a “sentimental” literature founded on the purportedly universal faculty of sympathy flourished in the work of both women and men. And just as the philosophy of sympathy inspired diverse and even conflicting social, political, economic, and other practices (i.e., it was used both to justify slavery as an act of white benevolence and to attack a system that separated loving mothers from their children), so too did the literature of sympathy assume a variety of forms, purposes, and styles.

At its most conventional, the sentimental literary text could be quite socially conservative. Such texts tried to ease a reader or character’s sorrows instead of analyzing,

critiquing, or seeking redress for the *source* of the sorrows. In daily and weekly newspapers around the nation, readers might find this literature of solace in lines such as the following from a Detroit newspaper editor: "Be patient till our joy appears, / Our turn will come some day" (Hopkins, 1876: 31). However, as critic Philip Fisher has pointed out, the sentimental text could also attempt to challenge social norms by extending sympathy across lines of class or race. So Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), and Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884) attempted to teach white readers to sympathize with black and Indian characters on the basis of a common humanity.

Just as it could serve both conservative or reformist social impulses, the sentimental literary text could either simplify complex social and philosophical problems or illuminate ambiguities and complexities. Thus, faced with the political question of how and whether to regulate the consumption of alcohol, T.S. Arthur's popular temperance narrative *Ten Nights in a Bar-room, and What I Saw There* (1854) insisted simply that the consumption of alcohol led to the ruin of the helpless: it is "'the thorn in [the] dying pillow'" (p. 126) of one drunkard's innocent daughter. Whereas Arthur uses the sentimental trope of the sympathetic victim to filter unsettling social, political, and physiological questions about the effects and the proper regulation of alcohol through a single moral lens, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* uses the vulnerability of the sentimental victim to illuminate precisely the *complex* problems inherent in a slave economy. Pursued sexually by the father of her "mistress," Jacobs' persona, Linda Brent, chooses the lesser of two evils: an affair with another white man. By aspiring to live by the moral code that she learned from free white women, Brent/Jacobs reveals that the American slave system and a chastity-based morality are mutually incompatible. Brent's/Jacobs's narrative destabilizes whatever moral complacency the chaste reader may have felt in a slave society, forcing the reader to reevaluate her assumptions about female morality, the laws of slavery, or both.

Although there are significant variations in the style of these and other sentimental literary texts, there are also enough common traits to constitute a family or movement – to justify the shared designation of "sentimental" for this diverse body of texts, regardless of their relative social conservatism or reformism, philosophical and stylistic simplicity or complexity. Chiefly, this literature of solace, sympathy, and reform emphasized stylistic traits that would allow it to reach a wide audience and convey its message with a minimum of ambiguity. As critic Joanne Dobson argues in "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature," "An emphasis on accessible language, a clear prose style, and familiar lyric and narrative patterns defines an aesthetic whose primary quality of transparency is generated by a valorization of connection, an impulse toward communication with as wide an audience as possible" (Dobson, 1997: 268). In addition, sentimental prose may shift between narrative modes (i.e., narration and preaching or judging) and points of view as it repeats and highlights key thematic or moral messages. A sentimental style, then, tends not to draw attention to the text as an artistic creation or the author as an artist, but to the reader as a subject that the text can influence if it makes itself sufficiently clear, affecting, relevant, and persuasive.

To effect these ends, in prose or verse, sentimental stylists choose literary strategies that we may classify under the broad headings of “transparency” and redundancy, all the while creating an atmosphere of vulnerability that justifies the text’s typical impulse toward consolation or reform.

Frances Osgood’s “The Child Playing with a Watch” demonstrates that “transparency” in language, imagery, and form can support a complex tone and theme. Read aloud, the poem *sounds*, as its title suggests, playful and uncomplicated. Its rolling anapestic tetrameter, assonance and alliteration (“Oh, show him those shadowless, innocent eyes”), and rhymed couplets complement the familiar language and imagery (of a “beaming” “blossom”-child) to create a charming and childlike tone. However, the tone and subject are not as innocent as they might seem. The motherly writer-speaker uses all her poetic arts to create an atmosphere of “sweet baby-glee,” where “rich hair reposes” and “dimples are playing ‘bopeep’ with the roses”; yet the mother will only “keep” her treasured child if Time, an unlikely playmate with “wrinkled brow” and “rough neck,” can be charmed from his usual fatal course. When the speaker hopes in the closing lines that “. . . still in all seasons, in storms and fair weather / May Time and my Ellen be playmates together,” she reveals that whatever control she may possess over the sound of the poem, she does not possess over Ellen’s mortality. The poem’s easy style, smooth sounds, and predictable form mask a desperate mother’s attempt to stave off the uneasy and unpredictable associations of her daughter’s not-so-innocent playmate (Walzer, 1992: 123–4).

More often, the clear language, sparse imagery, and familiar form of a sentimental ballad support a simpler theme. For example, in one poem that circulated in upstate New York newspapers, a first-person speaker who has lost a child urges other “tired mothers” to appreciate the “blessedness” of their own children while the children are alive (Hopkins, 1876: 7–8). The speaker details the “little elbow,” “dear eyes,” “thatch of tangled hair,” and other childish parts that mothers take for granted in language, imagery, and smooth iambic pentameter quatrains designed to facilitate easy comprehension. There is no ambiguity in lines such as “We are so dull and thankless, and so slow / To catch the sunshine till it slips away”; like many a latter-day “Dear Abby” correspondent, the speaker urges readers not to follow her negative example, but rather to count their blessings, to appreciate the living. With its simple, timeless, and familiar theme, this conventional sentimental poem depends on the grace of its style, the pathos of its speaker, and the sympathetic inclination of the reader for its success.

Such poems combining simplicity of theme with transparency of style and clear consistency of feeling were often disparaged in the twentieth century, seemingly just because they are embarrassingly easy to understand – an insult to the intelligence of any serious reader once American literature became a course of academic study. Two more poems with similarly plain themes will illustrate the difference between a “good” and “bad” sentimental poem, judged on nineteenth-century terms. With much of sentimental literature striving for plainness, its “style [enlisted] in the service of a wider purpose” that the writer wishes to make explicitly clear (Clark, 1991: 16), it is not enough to distinguish only philosophically and stylistically complex literature (like

Osgood's "The Child Playing with a Watch") from direct and simple texts such as May Riley Smith's "Tired Mothers." A poem like "Tired Mothers" achieves its purpose – persuading mothers to appreciate their living children – precisely because its theme is readily available to any reader, unimpeded by textual ambiguity or a distracting display of authorial ingenuity. So, too, Alice Cary's "Sunday Morning" makes its simple, pious point in a clear ballad whose style suits the poem's subject. A less successful poem, "The Prisoner's Address to His Mother," published anonymously in a California newspaper in 1846, uses superficial elements of sentimental style without the clear purpose or the identifiable object of sympathy that are typical of the mode at its best.

Cary's "Sunday Morning" offers a serene, meditative, and successful example of the sentimental consolation ballad, a perfect marriage of subject, form, and style. The diction of the poem is plain, but reinforces sentimental ideals of sweetness, wisdom, and "silent strength." Figurative language is sparse and unobtrusive, and a nearly perfect ballad form contributes to the "composed, majestic" tone while evoking the tradition of a religious hymn:

O day to sweet religious thought
 So wisely set apart,
 Back to the silent strength of life
 Help thou my wavering heart.

Nor let the obtrusive lies of sense
 My meditations draw
 From the composed, majestic realm
 Of everlasting law.

Break down whatever hindering shapes
 I see, or seem to see,
 And make my soul acquainted with
 Celestial company.

(Cary, "Sunday Morning," p. 245)

Although the speaker feels that her heart is "wavering" and that "hindering shapes" in the world of sense distract her from higher, heavenly thoughts, the smooth, rarely broken iambs suggest how "resistless" indeed, in the language of the closing stanza, are "The things ordained of God." Whatever the doubts of the speaker, the poem does not allow any hindrances to mar the gracefully measured rhythm, diction, and tone, which are so well suited to the poem's consolatory and "ordained" conclusion.

On the other hand, the anonymous California ballad, "The Prisoner's Address to His Mother," though conventionally sentimental in its tetrameter form and theme of homesick mother-love, lacks the "grace" and "ease" prized by sentimental reviewers and the coherence requisite to a superior poem. First, in the poem's iambic meter, an unnatural accent repeatedly falls on the second syllable of the important word "mother," as in lines "I'm far away from thee, mother, / No friend is near me now." Second, while the sentimental goals

of transparency and sympathy make the position of the speaker quite clear in Osgood's and Cary's poems, the speaker of "The Prisoner's Address" never makes his situation clear enough that a reader can sympathize. Although the title suggests that he may be literally or figuratively incarcerated (we never learn which), the stanzas indicate other conflicts: the "burning brow" of one line, combined with the speaker's hope in the final stanza of heavenly reunion with his mother, suggests that he may be suffering from a mortal illness; yet in another stanza, "the trouble" that caused his faithless friends to abandon him seems only to be the attraction of the "baneful cup" that "dashed" his early "hopes." The poem seems, like most in the sentimental tradition, to court the reader's sympathy, but since it never makes plain the source of its speaker's ambiguous and powerful grief, the reader can only suspect this to be one of those *inauthentic* texts, a mere string of conventions, that disparaging twentieth-century critics took to represent the entire mode.

Like any style, then, a sentimental style *when it works* is demonstrably coherent, and since the mode is predicated on human sympathy, its best writers and texts do bring plausible human characters and predicaments to life. In the nineteenth century, coherence and vitality in prose and verse did not rule out a certain degree of redundancy. In fact, in sentimental fiction, the theme or moral of a scene is commonly repeated in the omniscient and judgmental voice of the narrator: that is, a writer can interrupt his or her narrative to underscore a point without losing coherence, for the unity of sentimental fiction lies in its moral or thematic purpose, not in the consistency of its narrative point-of-view. Such repetitions and shifts in voice were not only tolerated but were expected in sentimental discourse, since style was serving a purpose, which called for political and philosophical conclusions to be made explicit.

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* demonstrates that in literary mode and voice, the sentimental novel was at times closer to the genre of the sermon than to the realist novel as later theorized by Henry James. Iterating the same thematic points in adjacent modes of narration, judgment, and moral abstraction, Stowe's redundant technique leaves no ambiguity about what conclusions she expects the reader to draw. In the chapter "In Which It Appears That a Senator Is but a Man," Mary Bird's challenge to her husband is also Stowe's to the reader: "'would *you* now turn away a poor, shivering, hungry creature from your door, because he was a runaway? *Would* you, now?'" (p. 69). And the narrator satirically but unambiguously adds her knowledge that "our senator had the misfortune to be a man who had a particularly humane and accessible nature" (p. 69). In the dialogue and in this ironic bit of omniscient reporting, Stowe makes plain that "humanity" dictates that the Birds (and others) break the law and aid the runaway Eliza. But in case the reader has not yet drawn the appropriate moral conclusions, she makes the point again in a voice of preacherly moral abstraction, generalizing about the "blessed souls" who turn their personal sufferings to the benefit of others, as Mrs. Bird does when she sends Eliza's Harry away in the clothes of her own recently deceased son. In the action and dialogue, in the narrator's omniscient (and sometimes satirical) judgment of her characters, and in her general moral pronouncements, the theme of the chapter is redundantly clear: it is "right" to aid fugitive slaves, wrong to uphold the law that would return them to an inhumane system.

The daughter and sister of the famous Beecher preachers is not the only sentimental novelist to judge and moralize about her characters in order to guide the reader's conclusions. Even Nathaniel Hawthorne, among the most securely canonized of nineteenth-century American writers, makes similar pronouncements, leaving no ambiguity about where his narrator's sympathies lie in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). A seemingly petty early comparison between the "fair" American women of the nineteenth century and the "coarser . . . wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding" (p. 121) introduces the narrator's own bias, which his story will bear out: the unsympathetic legalism of the Puritans will also strike him as "coarse" in its failure to understand and appreciate the "agony," "shame," and sensibility of the fair Hester Prynne (pp. 124, 128). Later, in a chapter called "The Elf-Child and the Minister," when Hester refuses Mistress Hibbins's invitation to visit the forest and sign "the Black Man's book" because she must take care of Pearl, the narrator reiterates the moral of the scene so the reader cannot mistake it. Hester's choice illustrates the nineteenth-century sentimental "argument against sundering the relation of a fallen mother to the offspring of her frailty" (p. 170), for the child protects the mother from further sin. Although Hawthorne makes fewer such pronouncements than Stowe, his occasional narrative intrusions corroborate the sentimental philosophy of sympathy that his narration otherwise demonstrates. It is an ethic he does not wish his nineteenth-century readers, who might be inclined to take their principles for granted, to miss.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and other novels with ties to the sentimental tradition, shifts between a judging third-person and a narrative that enters the consciousness of primary characters (*Scarlet Letter*) or a dialogue that reveals characters' thoughts (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*) enable the writer to draw explicit moral conclusions and to elicit sympathy for major characters with the narrative modes best suited to each sentimental goal. In addition, sentimental poetry and prose are alike notorious for their frequent use of second-person direct address. In one of the most oft-quoted lines of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe presses her reader the way Mrs. Bird presses her husband: "If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, to-morrow morning, . . . how fast could *you* walk?" (pp. 43–4). Stowe frames her rhetorical questions in such a way that the (implicitly free, white) reader can only respond sympathetically to the slave heroine. Like the modal shift between narration and moral pronouncement, such a shift to direct address in a narrative otherwise dominated by a third-person speaker does not introduce new material, but reinforces ongoing themes of the sentimental text from a new vantage. In this case, both third-person and second-person speech elicit sympathy from the white reader for the slave Eliza.

Direct address in poetry is less likely to create textual redundancy than in prose, since many sentimental poems are written entirely or mostly in the second person. In both genres, as critic Mary Louise Kete argues, sentimental direct address enables writers and readers to *generate* the very communities that the texts idealize. That is, sympathy and community are not simply subjects discussed or modeled on the page, but created actively between writers, readers, and characters in the rhetorical

connections between “I” and “you.” Such is the case in Lydia Sigourney’s “The Stars,” a poem with three distinct sets of addressees. First, the speaker urges human readers to “Make friendship with the stars” and take troubling metaphysical questions to them. In line nine, after a series of such questions, the speaker realigns herself *with* readers as the “we” who address “you, stricken stars.” That is, she does what she urges the readers to do: takes her questions to the stars. Figuring Orion, Cassiopeia, the north star, Arcturus, and others as human guardians, mentors, queens, and the like, the speaker and implied readerly friends ask for lessons from the stars that can help explain human losses and guide human actions. In the end, though, the “you” shifts again, this time turned back upon the “most arrogant” and inquisitive speaker. From an unspecified prophetic voice – perhaps emanating from the stars, or God – the speaker is instructed to “Ask no more! / But let thy life be one long sigh of prayer, / One hymn of praise, till from the broken clay, / At its last gasp, the unquench’d spirit rise,” returning to “Him, from whom its essence came” (Walker, 1992: 2–5).

In this poem, the shifting second-person point of view allows the speaker to create communities of sympathy and common experience with “we” and “you” readers and with “you” stars. The divine voice must command the speaker “Back to the dust” at the end of the poem because she has presumed to ally herself rhetorically with celestial bodies – an act the closing speaker recognizes and prohibits. From a community-constituting poem of rhetorical questions and direct address (and the ambitious, illustrious form, blank verse) to a consolation poem, “The Stars” charts its speaker’s aspiration, limitation, and intended consolation. It is supposed to be a good thing when the speaker’s “unquench’d spirit” rises on the last day, and the closing lines remind her that God, not her own impatient curiosities, will direct when she is allowed to ascend to the “unnumber’d worlds” in the heavens. Still, there is some metaphysical frustration in this ostensible consolation poem when there is no answer back from the rhetorical community that the poet has spent nearly one hundred lines attempting to create; instead, she is instructed to wait to merge with the heavenly others when God ordains it.

Two final hallmarks of a sentimental style do not fit well under the broad classifications of transparency or redundancy. First, sentimental texts, especially novels, tend to describe the physical bearing or outward appearance of characters in a way that emphasizes their vulnerability. Second, many sentimental texts underscore that vulnerability with diminutive diction. These stylistic devices lend abjection to a character or narrative, and for some texts, stylized abjection collaborates with other literary techniques to elicit greater sympathy, outrage, or other emotions that will help the text achieve a reformist or consolatory purpose.

Several discourses of the body coincide during the first half of the nineteenth century alone, and they often overlap with sentimental depictions of vulnerability. The Romantic or transcendental body is a material reflection of a spiritual truth. So the body of Romantic Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, broken and propped up by whalebone, reflects his diseased spirit and his likeness to the godly, destructive whale he seeks. On the other hand, medical discourse in the mid-nineteenth century treated both male and

female bodies as sites of potential disease. Good health followed from proper controls over the body, especially the sexual passions. Many discourses of race also had their own representations of bodies. In Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* (1844) and other contemporary Anglo texts, Native American bodies testify to the Anglo-American belief that Indians are a declining and "vanishing" race. Karen Sanchez-Eppler points out that the supposedly rational, disembodied discourse of American citizenship actually assumed the power of a white male body; autobiographies of escaped slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, on the other hand, assert that black and female bodies contain human spirits as free-willed and full of agency as white, male bodies, even though the nation did not yet recognize black or female bodies as outward signs of citizens.

Sentimental texts invariably negotiate multiple discourses of the body; most characteristic of this mode, however, is an attention to physical vulnerability. Mixed with transcendental discourse, physical vulnerability suggests spiritual insignificance or abandonment, as it does when Melville's Pip in *Moby-Dick* is left alone in the sea with his diminutive name after jumping from a whaleboat in fear for his life. In a racially inflected text, a vulnerable body such as Linda Brent's may suggest the failures of law and ideology to protect a black female body from harm. That is, the meaning of the sentimentalized body may vary as the sentimental text intersects with other discourses of the body.

Given sentimentalism's special interest in consolation and reform, the most characteristic attitude of the abject or vulnerable body is the attitude of chastening or control. Conventionally, as in Cary's "Sunday Morning," bodily passions and distractions (the "hindering shapes" and "obtrusive lies of sense") precede or interrupt consolation. G. M. Goshgarian argues that sentimental novels taught women to constrain their natural passions, since separate spheres ideology depended on Woman to be pure and passionless. But Susan Warner's bestselling novel *The Wide, Wide World*, according to Goshgarian the most "instructive" of the mid-century novels concerning "the congenitally flawed child-woman who commutes passion into passion(lessness) at the prodding of God and a man" (p. 79), is not simply a study in self-control, but a primer as well in a woman's need for a marriageable, controlling male who can take charge of both her body and the threatening bodies of men who would do her violence. So John Humphreys, Ellen Montgomery's eventual husband, tutors her through the mid-section of the novel and rescues her in later chapters, first from the spiteful ex-shopkeeper who grabs hold of the bridle of Ellen's pony and begins to whip him, and later from the European uncle who forces her to drink wine against her will. Rescuing her from two men who submit her body (and her horse's body, as sympathetic surrogate for her own) to their controlling whims, John, as husband, will presumably govern her body in a way that is suited to that passionate/passionless vessel's own good. As Goshgarian puts it, "The Omnipotent, one gathers, is incapable of guaranteeing Ellen safe conduct without more potent male help" (p. 84).

If a society or a man fails to protect a woman, as promised by the covenant of ante-bellum gender ideology, the sentimental text displays that failure in the suffering

of the female body. As noted already, Jacobs's autobiography uses this convention to indict the laws of slavery for failing to protect her feminine chastity. Sigourney's *The Sutte*, a poem about a mother being immolated on her husband's funeral pyre, exposes the failure of another society to protect a wife and mother properly (according to middle-class American ideology). Arthur's *Ten-Nights in a Bar-room* illustrates this convention with particular gusto, for the body of dissipated Joe Morgan receives very little description; instead, his alcoholic overindulgence is lovingly displayed in the suffering bodies of his wife and daughter. With her conventional "pale face," "hesitating motion," and "soft blue eyes," daughter Mary's "native timidity" is "touchingly visible" to the narrator when he first observes her, around age ten, fetching her father from the tavern (p. 22). In chapter two, she is sensationally wounded by a tumbler aimed at her father, and the "deep" and bloody "gash" on her pale forehead presents a "shocking appearance" and "stun[s] her into insensibility" (pp. 60, 62). Doubling the impact, her mother appears at the door of the tavern, "slender," "attenuated," and "shadowy," and for half an hour she lies "white and pulseless" against her husband at the sight of her wounded daughter (pp. 64, 63). In these sensational sentimental texts and others like them, the outraged protectiveness of the reader is supposed to step in where society or individual men have failed, implementing appropriate reforms or charities so the violated (female) body is rescued from suffering and restored to mere vulnerability.

The same characters who are subject to these sentimental gazes – whose vulnerability is exposed presumably so they can be rescued by kindly readers – are also subject to diminutive naming. Sentimental literature favors such epithets as "little Ellen," "Ellie," "dear little Ellie," "dear Alice," and "dear Alice" in *The Wide, Wide World*; "lily-bud" and "baby-girl" in Osgood's "The Child Playing with a Watch"; "little Pearl" and "the infant" in *The Scarlet Letter*; "little Eva" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and even "Baby Budd" in Melville's "Billy Budd," which critic Eve Sedgwick reads as a sentimental narrative. Notably, in the cited texts, most of the characters who are infantilized with this pattern of diction die during the course of the narrative; those who do not (the two Ellens and Hawthorne's Pearl) are explicitly at physical or moral risk. (Pearl's case is least clear, but in a chapter devoted to "that little creature," Hawthorne and Hester both watch vigilantly for signs of the mother's sin in the daughter's moral constitution.) That is, the diminutive epithet draws attention to the vulnerability of the sentimental victim, a magnet for reader sympathy and a reflection of the vulnerability either of the reader or of people she knows. Hence insofar as it works to engage reader sympathy, the sentimental diminutive, like other stylistic devices, points outward to the necessity of consolation or reform in the reader's own fragile world.

Perhaps the most famous sentimental diminutive is Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" – a declaration and a poem summing up a number of sentimental stylistic devices and pointing to the possible adaptations of the sentimental mode beyond its conventional purposes. From the opening exclamation, the poem belies its own self-diminishing epithet with an aggressively opinionated and inquisitive subjectivity that recalls Sigourney's "The Stars." Whereas Sigourney's poem disciplines the speaker into

silence, Dickinson's ironically allows the speaker to scorn one kind of speech ("tell[ing] one's name") even as she asserts herself with commands ("Don't tell!") and opinions ("How dreary—"). For a "Nobody," this speaker has plenty of subjectivity, enough that one might read this poem as a strong rejection of the submission, convention, and vulnerability of sentimental tradition. Insofar as this "Nobody" is engaged in claiming a powerful, willful writerly identity, the poem performs a most anti-sentimental work.

Still, the poem also meets the sentimental goal of stabilizing vulnerable characters in consolatory and empowering communities. In the first stanza, the speaker invites another "Nobody" into an intimate "pair" in which "you" and "I" together become more than they were individually. As no-bodies, these figures are ungendered, a status defiant of the gender-making sentimental tradition and its embodied signs of mortal vulnerability. In a series of paradoxes, the sentimental gesture of diminishing the characters (as Nobodies) also unconventionally disembodies them (as no-bodies), which in turn does typical sentimental work of rescuing the speaker and "you" from the perils that might befall them as public, visible Some-bodies.

In ballad form with extra breaks at the hyphens, with familiar diction and all-too-mundane imagery (of a Frog in a Bog), Dickinson's poem outsentimentalizes the sentimental. It transparently invites the reader into a plain and playful community of empowering, willed abjection while casting the illusion with its surprising use of "Nobody" and "Somebody" that everyone *except* the reader belongs outside the "pair" of clever intimates. As in any sentimental text, it is up to the reader to opt in or out of the proffered community of shared experience. Also in keeping with convention, the reader will be admitted only on the basis of her/his admitted abjection or loss. Typically, too, if the style of this text manages to hook the reader's sympathy or identification, the reader is promised more power than s/he possessed alone. To enter sympathetically into "I'm Nobody!" or another sentimental text is to assume the power of a community which, despite its apparent simplicity and abjection, always exceeds the power of one.

Emily Dickinson is just one of the canonical writers we can read more productively if we understand sentimental techniques, yet who cannot be confined to a single descriptive label. The remainder of this chapter explores the relation of two other canonical writers to the sentimental stylistic tradition. Given the importance he placed on his stories' "effect," one might suppose that Edgar Allan Poe would employ sentimental stylistics extensively. However, he frequently parts company with both sentimental literary goals and the style by which his contemporaries achieved them. From a sentimental perspective, Poe was right to distinguish Nathaniel Hawthorne's early stories from his own. Yet even Hawthorne at his most sentimental distances his authorial persona from a conventional discourse that seems too "narrow" for his imagination. Both writers in their published writings take up a full range of subjects suitable for sentimental treatment, such as death, friendship, passion, spiritual isolation, romantic love, the struggle for spiritual consolation, and the search for home, with only a limited use of sentimental style. Although any number of their stories might lend themselves to a sentimental analysis, for the sake of illustration, this chapter will close by observing

the stylistic devices that distinguish Hawthorne's *Old Manse* from Poe's *House of Usber*, with some brief notes on the relationship between domesticity, sentimentalism, and sensation in the works of these two writers.

The house where Hawthorne lived in Concord as a newly married man evoked some of his most sentimental prose. His description of the house in *The Old Manse* (1846) uses the sentimental diminutive to describe "the most delightful little nook of a study," "two pleasant little pictures of the Lake of Como," and "our pleasant little breakfast-room" (Hawthorne, 1974: 5, 33). The fruit trees in the orchard "possess a domestic character" based on a history of reciprocal care: they "have grown humanized by receiving the care of man, as well as by contributing to his wants" (p. 12). From the subtitle, "The author makes the reader acquainted with his abode," Hawthorne assumes an explicit, second-person relation to the reader as is common in sentimental fiction and poetry. Figuring the reader as "my guest in the old Manse" (p. 6), he structures the essay as a guided tour of the property and the portions of the house, the study and the garret, related to his public activity as a writer. "Come," he invites after a reflection on the sluggish Concord River (p. 8), and a few pages later, "The old Manse! We had almost forgotten it, but will return thither through the orchard" (p. 11). The author's language tends toward the plain and quotidian, with accessible, homely choices for figurative language, such as "vegetable progeny" for the garden that he cultivates and recommends to any bachelor who would like to know how it feels to raise children (pp. 13–14). The essay even turns a moral from time to time about the way different people make "ugly and evil" or "good and beautiful results" from the same circumstances (p. 7) or about the author's gratitude for life in the bountiful autumn (p. 27). But Hawthorne's conclusion asserts an individuality on the part of the author that violates the reader-oriented, self-effacing work of sentimental conventions.

Sharing a sense of privacy with contemporary women writers who masked impolite, unspeakable individualities behind a language of convention (Dobson, 1989: 57), Hawthorne confesses that for all his "babbling" about his home, "[m]y conscience . . . does not reproach me with betraying anything too sacredly individual. . . . How little I have told! – and, of that little, how almost nothing is even tintured with any quality that makes it exclusively my own!" (p. 32). Indeed, near the end of *The Old Manse* he offers what may be the most illuminating passage we have from a nineteenth-century writer explaining his generation's propensity for stock images or clichés. It is worth quoting at some length:

Has the reader gone wandering, hand in hand with me, through the inner passages of my being, and have we groped together into all its chambers, and examined their treasures or their rubbish? Not so. We have been standing on the green sward, but just within the cavern's mouth, where the common sunshine is free to penetrate, and where every footstep is therefore free to come. I have appealed to no sentiment or sensibilities, save such as are diffused among us all. So far as I am a man of really individual attributes, I veil my face; nor am I, nor have ever been, one of those supremely hospitable people, who serve up their own hearts delicately fried, with brain-sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public.

(Hawthorne, 1974: 32–3)

The passage seems a rejection of sentimental authorship, if such authorship assumes that textual relations are also bodily relations (“hand in hand”) or that sentimental authorship is a kind of “hospitality” or intimacy. But Hawthorne also aligns himself with the women writers described by Joanne Dobson, who were taught to dread public disclosure; sentimentalism allowed polite women to “conventionalize” heroines to avoid disclosing their own “personal experience of womanhood” (Dobson, 1989: 57; see Kelley, 2008, for an investigation of the kinds of disclosure available to antebellum women). Like his middle-class female contemporaries, Hawthorne only offers feelings and experiences “such as are diffused among us all.” The sentimental style of *The Old Manse* is perfectly calibrated to express his personal contentment at this stage of his life without revealing anything too personal, such as any details of his family life.

Yet even as Hawthorne manifests a sentimentalist’s aversion to personal disclosure, his declaration also takes us even farther beyond sentimental discourse than Dickinson’s bold “I’m Nobody,” for in the act of teasing the reader with “inner passages” left unvisited, Hawthorne claims a kind of selfhood unfamiliar to sentimental convention. For one thing, it is a masculine selfhood in a discourse dominated by women writers and female characters; no middle-class nineteenth-century woman writer in any mode more polite than pornography would cast hints about the “treasures” of her “inner passages.” Like Hawthorne playing the self-conscious part of host to a guest, the sentimental narrator tends to occupy a conventional and publicly acceptable role – the mother anxious about her child’s mortality, the reformer stringing vignettes of suffering into an abolitionist or temperance narrative, the Christian querying God, and so on. Even Harriet Jacobs, whose *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* reveals more personal detail than most sentimental narratives, would prefer if she had a choice to live on the “green sward” of convention and public virtue. But unlike so many female sentimentalists, Hawthorne undermines his conventional persona in *The Old Manse* when he exclaims, “How narrow – how shallow and scanty too – is the stream of thought that has been flowing from my pen, compared with the broad tide of dim emotions, ideas, and associations, which swell around me from that portion of my existence!” (p. 32). Although he resumes the voice of convention and sentiment for the final paragraphs of *The Old Manse*, he has let us know that he, the author, is “broader” than the “narrow” role he has assumed for the sake of a brief literary companionship.

In his 1847 review of Hawthorne’s *Mosses from an Old Manse* and in other essays, Poe articulates a literary philosophy mostly hostile to sentimental aims. The “effect” that he sought to create in his fiction was not at all the feeling of fellowship, consolation, or redemption intended by writers working in the sentimental mode. In a “tale” or short story, he explained, the author should combine words, events, and tone to produce “a certain single effect” upon the reader. “And by such means,” he continued, “with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction” (Poe, 1956: 448). A Poesque tale fulfilled its design when it provided “satisfaction” to a

reader who understood himself or herself to be in the presence of art. An “obtrusive” moral violated the obligation of “poesy” or art to produce only beauty (pp. 435–7). As Poe well understood, his theory of art stood in direct contradiction to the emotional restraint and moral heavy-handedness that he identified with New England, the *North American Review*, and conservative quarterly magazines (p. 442; see Thompson, 1994). But he mistook sentimental culture’s studied self-control for “a holy horror of being moved” (ibid.). Where sentimentalism sought to channel chaotic passion through conventional language and imagery toward redemptive or consoling states of feeling, Poe saw passionate chaos as itself beautiful; he and the sentimentalists were simply trying to evoke different ranges of feeling.

Poe forgoes the opportunity for sentimentalizing early in *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1845) when he alludes to a sentimental text that he does not reproduce. The narrator initiates his visit to Roderick Usher, an “intimate associate” from boyhood, at a sentimental prompt: Usher has written a letter to “his best, and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady” (p. 96). The narrator is moved by “the manner,” “the apparent heart that went with his request,” to “obey” the call of a one-time friend in need (ibid.). In other words, Usher’s letter is a successful sentimental text, moving its reader (our narrator) to an action that may bring consolation and fellowship to the author. But Poe does not share any of the heartfelt and efficacious letter. Instead, he allows his narrator to sum it up in his own Gothic voice as “wildly importunate” (ibid.). In this textual elision, Poe indicates that he will not develop the sentimental possibilities of a friendship tale.

With elevated and archaic language, complex sentence structures, and startling imagery, *Usher* refuses the plain diction and imagery characteristic of much sentimental discourse. Upon entering the House of Usher, the narrator offers a typically qualified and convoluted sentence, far from sentimental transparency:

While the objects around me – while the carvings of the ceilings, the somber tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy – while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this – I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up.

(Poe, 1956: p. 98)

Both the aristocratic setting and the narrator’s professed familiarity with “armorial trophies” create distance, not intimacy, between a middle-class American reader and the characters in the tale. So does a “phantasmagoric” language of “ebon blackness” and “encrimsoned light” (p. 98). In this story, a lake is a “tarn”; illness a “dissolution,” a “settled apathy,” and a “prostrating power” (pp. 96, 100–1). Prose thickens with modifiers, as when a storm develops with “impetuous fury,” and “unnatural light” on a “tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night,” “wildly singular,” and so on (p. 108). Verbs become startling and unnatural at key moments in the tale, with the narrator

and Usher by turns leaping, rushing, springing, and shrieking at the story's climax (p. 111). Poe hints at his style when the narrator passes through a "Gothic archway" early in the story; he parodies it near the end by paralleling his story to that of an "antique volume" in which a "gauntleted" knight battles "a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanour, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold" (pp. 98, 108–9, *sic*). If sentimentalism is a humane and humanizing discourse, Poe's "superhuman" effects belong to another literary mode (p. 111).

A comparison of Poe's *Usher* with Sarah Orne Jewett's *Miss Tempy's Watchers* (1888) further illustrates the difference between a sentimental treatment of death and Poe's sensational but unsentimental prose. In Jewett's story, as in Poe's, two characters pass the time in a house with a corpse. The smile on Miss Tempy's "white face" is a "wonderful" feature that one experienced neighbor knows will be gone by morning; it calls up no terrifying associations. Replacing the "light covering" over Miss Tempy in an upstairs room of her house, her ritual "watchers" descend the stairs to the warm and welcoming kitchen (p. 248). After conversation and a midnight tea to soothe "good country appetites," a "drowsy," companionable silence lulls both to sleep (pp. 251, 253). For Jewett, the prospect of life after death in the mortal world is so implausible that her characters can make light talk about it. Before dozing, one of the dead woman's friends exclaims, "'How many things we shall be wanting to ask Tempy! . . . I can't make up my mind to doin' without her. I wish folks could come back just once, and tell us how 't is where they've gone. Seems then we could do without 'em better'" (p. 253). Miss Binson's dialect speech and simple sentences reflect her simple, conversational wish that the dead could return long enough to provide guidance to the living. In Jewett's sentimental, relational ghost story, the dead do not need to rise "phantasmagorically" to work upon the living world. In the course of the night, self-absorbed Mrs. Crowe begins to find "a new sympathy for the hard-worked little woman" who proves to be the more kindly and self-possessed watcher in the night (p. 253). Such are the "simple" and moral lessons of a sentimental death-tale, in contrast to the "tumultuous" and supernatural effects rendered by Poe (Jewett, 1994: 253; Poe, 1956: 112).

In the latter case, Poe's language is consistently elevated and his view of death terrifying instead of soothing. Rooms are chilly instead of warm; the corpse is buried deep below the house in an old dungeon, behind a heavy door. Looking upon Madeline Usher in her coffin, the narrator sees "the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death" (p. 106). In Poe's supernatural story, the boundaries between life and death are horribly imprecise – i.e., Roderick is a "tenant" in his house as is Madeline in her coffin (pp. 100, 106). Sensational deaths and crumbling architecture leave the narrator "aghast" – and the reader enjoying the chilly aesthetic "satisfaction" that Poe described as his object in his review of Hawthorne's short fiction (pp. 112, 448). As we would expect after reading Poe's critical essays, the Usher family offers no lesson for the living world beyond the text.

Reading Hawthorne's domestic tour of the old Manse and Poe's sensational narration of the last days of the Usher house, we find some kinship with the sentimental mode. Hawthorne delights in "little" pleasures and transparent speech and beckons us in an intimate second-person voice to be his guests; Poe shows us vulnerable bodies pressed to the last degree of receptive sensibility, including the fissured and grey body of the Usher house itself. But for Hawthorne and Poe, a transparent, sentimental style means a transparent author, or as Emily Dickinson puts it, a "Nobody." Inhospitable Hawthorne must have his reader know that his "individual attributes" make him a somebody, and Poe, mastermind of literary effects, strains for what he calls in his essays "originality," which in the Gothic House of Usher means jarring the reader out of any sentimental expectations formed when an old friend answers a plea for comfort. As we learn from the critical literature of recent decades, domesticity and sensationalism may collaborate with sentimentalism to inspire personal and social reform, consolation, or community formation. But Hawthorne and Poe teach us that domestic idealism and sensational diction do not in themselves constitute a sentimental text; indeed, each man parts company with sentimental transparency to leave finally the impression of a self-conscious author, visible and corporeal behind a rather thin veil.

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Transcendental Politics

Paul Lauter

There are as many ways of thinking about the transcendentalists as there are literary historians to think about them. One could focus on the pedigree of the name, “transcendentalist,” and its connections to Kant and his ideas about knowledge not of objects in Locke’s empirical tradition but of our “mode of knowing objects.” One could examine it as a more or less religious reaction to the desiccated Unitarianism of the early nineteenth century, tracing its development in the debates between George Ripley and Andrews Norton, and in Emerson’s dispensing with doctrine in his “Divinity School Address” and “The Lord’s Supper.” One could describe it as an aesthetic movement, an offshoot of continental and British romanticism, as in Emerson’s “The Poet” or in Elizabeth Peabody’s short-lived magazine, *Aesthetic Papers*. One could analyze it as a brief, small, but influential social movement, how the founding of the Transcendental Club and its magazine, *The Dial*, helped create a fresh and vital culture in the United States for many years in and after the middle of the nineteenth century. These are all useful and interesting approaches to the transcendentalists like William Henry Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, George Ripley, Henry David Thoreau, and others.

But I want, rather, to focus on three considerations somewhat different. First, the question of reform in American society and politics and how to accomplish it. Second, how it was possible for most of the transcendentalists to sustain their optimism in the face of changing and in many respects undesirable social realities. And third, how such optimism could be translated into the practices of thinking, speaking, and writing. The first issue is embodied in this passage:

No one can observe the signs of the times with much care, without perceiving that a crisis as to the relations of wealth and labor is approaching. It is useless to shut our eyes to the fact, and like the ostrich fancy ourselves secure because we have so concealed our heads that we see not the danger. We or our children will have to meet this crisis. The old war between the King and the Barons is well nigh ended, and so is that between the

Barons and the Merchants and Manufacturers – landed capital and commercial capital. The business man has become the peer of my Lord. And now commences the new struggle between the operative and his employer, between wealth and labor. Every day does this struggle extend further and wax stronger and fiercer; what or when the end will be God only knows.

(Brownson, 1840: 9)

The passage was not written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, but by Orestes Brownson in 1840. To be sure, the program Brownson urges upon his readers is hardly that of “The Communist Manifesto”; neither is it that of *Walden*, “simplify, simplify, simplify,” or “Self-Reliance,” “Trust thyself.” But Brownson does articulate a central feature of culture and society in the unsettled 1840s: rising class conflict, a conflict that many in the United States had thought the very founding of the country had eradicated. The Transcendentalists, I want to propose, responded in a particular way to this developing form of conflict; understanding why their solutions took the distinct forms they did opens their ideas to a twenty-first-century audience in accessible and useful ways.

A number of historical developments had generated the forms of class conflict of which Brownson took note. One was the formation of what the Rev. Henry A. Miles, minister of the First Unitarian Church in Lowell, Massachusetts, called a “permanent factory population.” Frederick William Coburn cites Miles in his *History of Lowell and Its People* to contrast what he took to be the differences between New England and old England in this respect:

It was emphasized that “we have no permanent factory population. This is the wide gulf that separates the English manufacturing towns from Lowell. The female operatives do not work, on an average, more than four and a half years in the factories. They then return to their homes and their places are taken by their sisters or by other female friends from their neighborhood . . . [Workers in England] are resident operatives, and are operatives for life, and constitute a permanent dependent factory caste. The latter [in New England] come from distant homes to which in a few years they return to be the wives of the farmers and mechanics of the country towns and villages. The English visitor to Lowell, when he finds it so hard to understand why American operatives are so superior to those of Leeds and Manchester, will do well to remember what a different class of girls we have here to begin with.”

(Coburn, 1920: 248–9)

An affecting picture, no doubt, which, sad to say, long before 1845 had no original. (Brownson commented: “But the great mass wear out their health, spirits, and morals, without becoming one whit better off than when they commenced labor. The bills of mortality in these factory villages are not striking, we admit, for the poor girls when they can toil no longer go home to die.”) In fact, accelerated by the depression of 1837, immigrant men, women, and children had long replaced almost all the Yankee women in the mills of Lowell, Lawrence, and the other industrial towns of New England.

These immigrants brought with them little by way of skills or tools; they could sell simply their own labor, and that only for a wage. They were thus different from an earlier class of Yankee artisans and apprentices, some of whom at least could sell a product – boots, say – for a price rather than their labor for a wage. This was no trivial distinction, as is manifest by a phrase of the time: “wage slave.” To quote Brownson once again:

In regard to labor two systems obtain: one that of slave labor, the other that of free labor. Of the two, the first is, in our judgment, except so far as the feelings are concerned, decidedly the least oppressive. If the slave has never been a free man, we think, as a general rule, his sufferings are less than those of the free laborer at wages. As to actual freedom one has just about as much as the other. The laborer at wages has all the disadvantages of freedom and none of its blessings, while the slave, if denied the blessings, is freed from the disadvantages.

(Brownson, 1840: 10)

The earlier American yeoman often had at least a small plot on which to raise vegetables, opportunities to leave his bench when the bluefish were running, and similar alternative sources of income denied the factory operative, at his or her machine fourteen and more hours a day. What the factory system most of all denied the “wage slave” was any meaningful control over his or her time. Such rapidly changing conditions of labor in New England (as in Melville’s “The Tartarus of Maids”) and the middle-Atlantic states (as in Rebecca Harding’s “Life in the Iron Mills”) were markedly worsened by the crash of 1837, which precipitated multiple bankruptcies, the pushing down of wages and the pushing up of the pace of factory work, and the employment of more and more children, among other industrial horrors. By 1840 and increasingly in the decades that followed, this crisis accelerated and, I want to suggest, played a larger role in the thinking of Transcendentalists than is sometimes noted. One thinks of Emerson’s remark in “The American Scholar”: “Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat . . . The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself” (1745). Whitman would comment about the presidencies of Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan:

Why reclining, interrogating? Why myself and all drowning?
 What deepening twilight–scum floating atop of the waters,
 Who are they as bats and night-dogs askant in the capitol?
 What a filthy presidential! (“To the States”)

It seems to me no accident that the longest chapter of *Walden* is “Economy,” which is at base about the possibility of detaching oneself from a system oppressive to body and spirit. Furthermore, especially for New Englanders, the rise of industrial capitalism was intimately tied to the perpetuation of the southern slave economy: the textile factories of Lowell and Lawrence demanded ever-greater supplies of their raw material, cotton, from southern markets. Mechanical innovations like the cotton gin and the

balancing machine helped insure the transmission of increasing quantities of cotton. But its production remained largely a product of hard hand labor, supplied by black slaves, driven with increasing ferocity by masters and overseers motivated by the earnings Yankee manufacturers would provide. Those same profits underwrote the styles of life of many comfortable northerners, effectively tying them to slavery itself as the source of their comfort. A kind of marriage of economic convenience thus became solemnized in the political sphere between white northerners involved in manufacture and trade – owners, managers, shareholders, retailers, workers, too, alas – and white southerners determined to maintain black servitude.

The central issue raised by the signs of the times to which Brownson and others pointed was how to bring about change in this increasingly ugly situation. Marx and Engels were, of course, clear about that: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of the world, unite.” That well-known slogan stands in graphic contrast to another powerful phrase of the same decade: “Trust thyself; every heart vibrates to that iron spring.” These sentences might stand as mottos for two contrasting approaches to the question of change: collective action or individual self-culture. To be sure, such a binary conceals the myriad ways in which individual action is necessarily implicated in any collective process, and how collective action itself alters the culture of individual people. But there are serious distinctions, which emerge by contrasting the way in which Emerson’s passage in “Self-Reliance” continues and a further quotation from Brownson. After urging us to “trust thyself,” Emerson writes:

Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

(Emerson, 1747)

“Trust,” “accept,” confide, obey – these are hardly the verbs of revolutionary collective action, nor are “Chaos and the Dark” the objects of social change, if, perhaps, transcendental reflection. At the same time, the passage implicitly charges the self-reliant individual, who is modeled for us by the strong, imperative voice of the speaker, with the responsibility to “guide,” more religiously to “redeem,” and more ambiguously still, to serve as “benefactor.” The passage is overwhelmingly optimistic – a feature to which I will turn in a moment – which provides a good deal of its undeniable power.

Here, once again, are Brownson’s more ironic accents, not, it is likely, directed to Emerson himself but resonant with respect to transcendentalist ideas for all that. Reformers, he writes,

would have all men wise, good, and happy; but in order to make them so, they tell us that we want not external changes, but internal; and therefore instead of declaiming against society and seeking to disturb existing social arrangements, we should confine ourselves to the individual reason and conscience; seek merely to lead the individual to repentance, and to reformation of life; make the individual a practical, a truly religious man, and all evils will either disappear, or be sanctified to the spiritual growth of the soul.

This is doubtless a capital theory, and has the advantage that kings, hierarchies, nobilities, – in a word, all who fatten on the toil and blood of their fellows, will feel no difficulty in supporting it . . . The truth is, the evil we have pointed out is not merely individual in its character. It is not, in the case of any single individual, of any one man's procuring, nor can the efforts of any one man, directed solely to his own moral and religious perfection, do aught to remove it. What is purely individual in its nature, efforts of individuals to perfect themselves, may remove. But the evil we speak of is inherent in all our social arrangements, and cannot be cured without a radical change of those arrangements.

(Brownson, 1840: 13, 14)

It should be said, however effective this passage, that by 1844 Brownson had retreated from his radical Transcendentalism, converting to Catholicism and criticizing his former views and compatriots; Emerson meanwhile had begun to speak more effectively against slavery and other forms of social oppression as well as for various political reforms.

However tenuous this contrast between individual self-culture and collective action for social change, it provides a useful thread for drawing up the contradictions in the Transcendentalist moment. Think of the contrast, for example, between Thoreau going alone to Walden Pond to live and George Ripley, William Henry Channing and others organizing Brook Farm. Channing was among those who, in 1846, while Thoreau was living at Walden, helped start the American Union of Associationists. The purpose of the Associations, like Brook Farm and Oneida, Channing wrote, is a “solemn and glorious work”:

1. To indoctrinate the whole People of the United States, with the Principles of Associative Unity;
2. To prepare for the time when the Nation like one man shall reorganize its townships upon the basis of perfect Justice.

(Channing, 2000: 354)

While people came to Brook Farm to listen, study, and learn how to balance labor and intellectual endeavor, Thoreau “walked in the village to see the men and boys” and to “hear some of the gossip,” which “taken in homoeopathic doses, was really as refreshing in its way as the rustle of leaves and the peeping of frogs” (Thoreau, 2000: 153). In a certain sense Brook Farm was intended to serve the city of Boston – and other such metropolises of the spreading industrial capitalist order – by offering a utopian alternative to reigning ideas of social organization. Walden was much more an individual

escape from that Boston world, a model for self-culture based upon a fundamental belief, as the last sentences of Thoreau's book has it, that "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star" (p. 264).

All the same, as I wrote in an Introduction to my edition of "Civil Disobedience" and *Walden*:

it is essential to understand that, like the course described and justified in "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau's act of living by himself at Walden Pond was not *only* a work of self-culture, self-purification, or self-assertion. It was not *only* a program to learn more deeply the natural laws that bound up the human, the animate, and the inanimate into a *universe*. It was not *only* a writer's endeavor, like a trip down the Concord and Merrimack rivers, to provide grist for his literary mill. It was all of these things, but like the efforts of those at Brook Farm and at Fruitlands, it was also a means for suggesting and inspiring concrete alternatives to wage slavery and to arrogant commercial culture. It was also, arguably, an attempt to reassert in the affairs of the nation the leadership of a kind of secular New England clerisy, university-educated men – and for the most part, they were men – who might offer not only ideas on paper but the practice of life lived to the beat of a different drummer.

(Thoreau, 2000: 9)

In any event, a fundamental, perhaps the fundamental, ground tone of transcendentalist writing is this imperative toward change.

II

There is in the outlook of Emerson, Thoreau, and most of the other Transcendentalists a startling, well-nigh inimitable optimism that believable change (if I can borrow a cadence from the America of 2008) can and will occur. I am always fond of citing a passage from Emerson's journal of May 1837: "Still hard times. Yet how can I lament, when I see the resources of this continent in which three months will anywhere yield a crop of wheat or potatoes. On the bosom of this vast plenty, the blight of trade & manufactures seems to me a momentary mischance." That is not, one is glad to note, what Mr. Emerson said to the Mechanics' Apprentices' Library Association when he spoke with them on January 25, 1841; one would like to know what they made of his lecture, "Man the Reformer." Thoreau is, if anything, even more transcendently sanguine:

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion

as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

(Thoreau, 990: 257)

Pursuing the life one has imagined with seriousness and reverence will transform not only oneself but the universe in which we find ourselves. It is a form of prophecy worthy of Isaiah. But it leaves us with a crucial question: what is the basis for this optimism about change? That is the second feature of Transcendentalism I wish to examine.

A starting point is provided by the railroad, that ambiguous deity of much nineteenth-century social and poetic discourse. The image of the engine is critical to Leo Marx's account of American thought in the nineteenth century; indeed, the engine provides part of the title of his important book, *The Machine in the Garden*. Early in that book, Marx quotes from and analyzes a passage from Hawthorne's Notebooks dealing with a neighborhood called "Sleepy Hollow." Hawthorne describes at some length the deep repose, the sabbath-like harmony of the landscape he is observing. Then he writes, in a passage central to Marx's analysis:

But, hark! There is the whistle of the locomotive – the long shriek, harsh, above all other harshness, for the space of a mile cannot mollify it into harmony. It tells a story of busy men, citizens, from the hot street, who have come to spend a day in a country village, men of business; in short of all unquietness; and no wonder that it gives such a startling shriek, since it brings the noisy world into the midst of our slumbrous peace. As our thoughts repose again, after this interruption, we find ourselves gazing up at the leaves, and comparing their different aspect, the beautiful diversity of green.

(Marx, 1964: 13–14)

Marx takes this passage as offering a paradigm central to American letters: "What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world – a simple pleasure fantasy – is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind. Our sense of its evocative power is borne out by the fact that variants of the Sleepy Hollow episode have appeared everywhere in American writing since the 1840s. We recall the scene in *Walden* where Thoreau is sitting rapt in a reverie and then, penetrating his woods like the scream of a hawk, the whistle of the locomotive is heard" (Marx, 1964: 15). Marx argues, indeed, that "the disturbing shriek of the locomotive changes the texture of the [Hawthorne's] entire passage" (p. 16).

Read closely, however, Thoreau's encounters with the train, primarily in the chapter on "Sounds," are far more ambiguous. Yes, the locomotive's whistle penetrates his woods "like the scream of a hawk," and yes, it brings "restless city merchants" or "adventurous country traders" to Concord (p. 118). But quickly the engine with its train of cars takes on mythic qualities, a "travelling demigod, this cloud-compeller,"

a “winged horse or fiery dragon” of some new mythology. If only, he complains, “the enterprise were as heroic and commanding as it is protracted and unwearied.” Still, “I watch the passage of the morning cars with the same feeling that I do the rising of the sun, which is hardly more regular” (p. 119). Thoreau seizes upon the metaphorical possibilities presented by the train: “We have constructed a fate, an *Atropos*, that never turns aside. (Let that be the name of your engine.) . . . We live the steadier for it. We are all educated thus to be sons of Tell” (p. 120). He adds, “I am refreshed and expanded when the freight train rattles past me” (p. 121), and while the pastoral valley of which Marx writes is surely “whirled past and away,” Thoreau ultimately returns to his meditations: “Now that the cars are gone by and all the restless world with them, and the fishes in the pond no longer feel their rumbling, I am more alone than ever” (p. 123). It is not that Thoreau has accommodated to the machine in his garden – “I will not have my eyes put out and my ears spoiled by its smoke and steam and hissing” (p. 123) – but he is able to absorb the train and what it represents into the larger design of the natural world where he resides.

Nowhere is what I might call the “naturalization” of the machine more evident than in the famous passage from “Spring” in which Thoreau describes at length the flow of sand down the railroad embankment that cuts through the Walden woods. I am going to quote this passage at length, for it seems to me particularly characteristic of the writer and his fundamental outlook on the life he observes. But first I want to emphasize that Thoreau is writing not just of a man-made phenomenon, the railroad, but of one that was widely seen, at least by some observers, as a danger not only to the tranquility of the countryside but to a whole way of life – which, indeed, it was. But that is not at all the way in which Thoreau poses the railroad: it is no unnatural machine upsetting the integrated harmony of Walden. Rather, it can be accounted for in the very universal terms nature, closely observed, has taught Thoreau and he is now teaching us:

Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the railroad through which I passed on my way to the village, a phenomenon not very common on so large a scale, though the number of freshly exposed banks of the right material must have been greatly multiplied since railroads were invented. The material was sand of every degree of fineness and of various rich colors, commonly mixed with a little clay. When the frost comes out in the spring, and even in a thawing day in the winter, the sand begins to flow down the slopes like lava, sometimes bursting out through the snow and overflowing it where no sand was to be seen before. Innumerable little streams overlap and interlace one with another, exhibiting a sort of hybrid product, which obeys half way the law of currents, and half way that of vegetation . . .

The whole bank, which is from twenty to forty feet high, is sometimes overlaid with a mass of this kind of foliage, or sandy rupture, for a quarter of a mile on one or both sides, the produce of one spring day. What makes this sand foliage remarkable is its springing into existence thus suddenly. When I see on the one side the inert bank – for the sun acts on one side first – and on the other this luxuriant foliage, the creation of an hour, I am

affected as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist who made the world and me – had come to where he was still at work, sporting on this bank, and with excess of energy strewing his fresh designs about. I feel as if I were nearer to the vitals of the globe, for this sandy overflow is something such a foliaceous mass as the vitals of the animal body. You find thus in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf. No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant by it . . .

. . . It is wonderful how rapidly yet perfectly the sand organizes itself as it flows, using the best material its mass affords to form the sharp edges of its channel. Such are the sources of rivers. In the silicious matter which the water deposits is perhaps the bony system, and in the still finer soil and organic matter the fleshy fibre or cellular tissue. What is man but a mass of thawing clay? The ball of the human finger is but a drop congealed. The fingers and toes flow to their extent from the thawing mass of the body. Who knows what the human body would expand and flow out to under a more genial heaven? Is not the hand a spreading palm leaf with its lobes and veins? The ear may be regarded, fancifully, as a lichen, umbilicaria, on the side of the head, with its lobe or drop. The lip – labium, from labor (?) – laps or lapses from the sides of the cavernous mouth. The nose is a manifest congealed drop or stalactite. The chin is a still larger drop, the confluent dripping of the face. The cheeks are a slide from the brows into the valley of the face, opposed and diffused by the cheek bones. Each rounded lobe of the vegetable leaf, too, is a thick and now loitering drop, larger or smaller; the lobes are the fingers of the leaf; and as many lobes as it has, in so many directions it tends to flow, and more heat or other genial influences would have caused it to flow yet farther.

Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature. The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf. What Champollion will decipher this hieroglyphic for us, that we may turn over a new leaf at last? This phenomenon is more exhilarating to me than the luxuriance and fertility of vineyards. True, it is somewhat excrementitious in its character, and there is no end to the heaps of liver, lights, and bowels, as if the globe were turned wrong side outward; but this suggests at least that Nature has some bowels, and there again is mother of humanity. This is the frost coming out of the ground; this is Spring. It precedes the green and flowery spring, as mythology precedes regular poetry. I know of nothing more purgative of winter fumes and indigestions. It convinces me that Earth is still in her swaddling-clothes, and stretches forth baby fingers on every side.

(pp. 244–6)

This is, I think, Thoreau at his best: learned, speculative, funny, provocative, original. But the passage also illustrates in detail the basis for the overwhelming transcendentalist optimism to which I alluded above. First, it links the human form – the hand, for example, or the face – and human constructions – the railroad embankment – to basic forms of nature – the leaf, above all else. Human beings are at one with nature: “Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature. The Maker of this earth but patented a leaf.” The quality of this observation, and its importance for Thoreau, is underlined by contrasting it with, for example, Emily Dickinson’s poem about the well (Dickinson, #1400):

But nature is a stranger yet;
 The ones that cite her most
 Have never passed her haunted house,
 Nor simplified her ghost.

The passage insists again and again that the “Maker of this earth,” the Artist, the potter at his wheel, is still very much active, is “still at work”: “There was never any more inception than there is now” (Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 1855, l. 32). The Maker is at once also at play, like the writer, “sporting on this bank.” Indeed, just as the Maker is creating foliage from sand and clay, so the writer is creating a responsive text from his material of choice, letters, which he deploys into an amazing variety of words in three languages and a diversity of sounds. Thus the writer locates himself in relation to his audience just where he presents the Maker sportively creating the flow down the embankment for the amusement, edification, and pleasure of the observing speaker, Thoreau. Word play, association, etymology here are not simply decorative but symbolic representations of how the speaker shares divinity with the Artist at work. The railroad embankment is no longer an intrusion upon nature but a form responsive to the very laws governing the leaf, the river, the human hand and face – in short, the fundamental structures of the *universe*. In such a world, the question raised by Emerson’s “valued adviser,” “‘But these impulses [from within] may be from below, not from above,’” is readily answered (“Self-Reliance”). They will be “from above” so long as one places oneself outside the pernicious distortions of society and remains open to the higher laws which govern the pond, the leaf, the railroad, the embankment, the self who “leans[s] and loafe[s] at my ease . . . observing a spear of summer grass” (Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 1855, l. 5).

III

But human beings do not live out their lives in a transcendental paradise, nor indeed at Walden Pond or “observing a spear of summer grass.” They encounter desire, greed, conflict, death, the everyday oppressions of field, factory and kitchen – in short, injustice. Not to speak of the demands of conscience, and those, like Garrison, claiming to speak in its voice. Increasingly in the 1840s and 1850s, Americans were faced with Thoreau’s inescapable question: “Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?” (“Civil Disobedience”: 24). This question comes directly in “Civil Disobedience” after what is, in effect, its answer: “Action from principle – the perception and the performance of right – changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. It not only divides states and churches, it divides families; ay, it divides the *individual*, separating the diabolical in him from the divine.” “Action from principle” came to seem not just increasingly desirable but inevitable for women and men who took the problems of

American society – slavery, war, patriarchy, class conflict – with the seriousness they deserved.

We learned in or from the 1960s and 1970s about the compelling power of social movements, especially when they reenforce one another, question existing policies, and thus bring into disrepute governing social norms. The struggle of the civil rights movement to bring segregation to an end helped what was initially a small and weak pacifist opposition to war and nuclear weapons arm itself for a broader and more conflicted battle to end the American intervention in Vietnam. Likewise, the commitment of those movements to freedom and equality helped inspire the feminist effort to end the oppression of women. Activism spurred activism and, as Thoreau had predicted, changed “things and relations.” If one could not remain silent when “Bull” Connor set dogs upon peaceful marchers in Alabama, one could not remain silent when Robert McNamara set B-52s upon Vietnamese peasants. And in the tenor of the time, one could *not* remain silent and maintain a sense of a principled life. Silence, as the later slogan of the movement to address the AIDS epidemic put it, equaled death. That was as true for writers and artists, including those who had come of age during the quiescent 1950s, as it was for activists. Poets who had looked inward or toward a faraway world of myth and symbol appeared upon the barricades, or at least in marches, readings, and activist publications – Adrienne Rich, Robert Bly, Denise Levertov, Galway Kinnell, Grace Paley among many others. There they joined writers of color who had long pursued the connections between literary creativity and social change.

I see the 1840s and 1850s through the lens provided by “sixties” movements. A certain groundwork had been laid in the previous decade with the establishment of the *Liberator* as an exponent of immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery, the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and Angelina Grimké’s “Appeal to the Christian Women of the South” (1836), wherein she enunciated in Christian terms the principle of non-violent resistance so vividly articulated in secular language by Thoreau a decade and more later. Grimké and her sister, Sarah, also had begun to challenge the mandates of patriarchy, including the custom that prohibited women from addressing mixed audiences. By 1841, Brook Farm had been organized; a successful slave revolt had been carried out on the ship *Creole*; and the rebellious slaves from the schooner *Amistad* had finally been freed by Supreme Court decision. 1843 saw the publication of Henry Highland Garnet’s inflammatory “Address to the Slaves of the United States of America” and the conflict over the annexation of Texas had begun. By 1846, the Mexican War was well under way, protests against segregation in the Boston schools continued as did agitation against the war. And then in 1848, *annus mirabilis*, gold is discovered in California; workers’ rebellions in France and Germany are put down; the Mexican War ends with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which effectively transfers a third of Mexican territory to the United States; the Free-Soil party is established to contest slave power at the polls; the Oneida Community is launched; and the first women’s rights convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York. I mention these details simply to suggest the accelerating pace of agitation, debate,

action, reaction, and conflict that mark the period and provide the social and cultural context for the kinds of changes we see happening among Transcendentalists.

Those changes are, for many, epitomized by the movement in Thoreau's work from *Walden* to "Slavery in Massachusetts," published the same year as *Walden*, 1854, and of course "A Plea for Captain John Brown" (1859–60) (Thoreau, 2000). How, people wonder, could the advocate of being locked up for non-payment of taxes, and the promoter of self-culture at the heart of *Walden*, who wrote in "Civil Disobedience," "I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad" (p. 25), emerge as an apologist, indeed effectively an advocate, for armed insurrection? These do not seem to me mysterious developments. Terry Robbins was, with William Ayers (falsely cited as the radical "friend" of candidate Obama in the 2008 election), the founder of and teacher in a lovely pre-school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, called "The Children's Community." I last saw him trying to pull a cop off his horse at a demonstration at the inaugural of Nixon and Agnew. Soon thereafter, he died in the explosion of a townhouse on 11th Street in New York, where he and other SDS activists were making anti-personnel bombs. One might dismiss those later actions as expressing a fanaticism fatal to the ideals of community, much less moral self-development. Likewise, there were those who dismissed "weird John Brown" as a fanatic dangerous even to the antislavery cause he espoused. Not so Thoreau:

It was his peculiar doctrine that a man has a perfect right to interfere by force with the slaveholder, in order to rescue the slave. I agree with him. They who are continually shocked by slavery have some right to be shocked by the violent death of the slaveholder, but no others. Such will be more shocked by his life than by his death. I shall not be forward to think him mistaken in his method who quickest succeeds to liberate the slave. I speak for the slave when I say that I prefer the philanthropy of Captain Brown to that philanthropy which neither shoots me nor liberates me. At any rate, I do not think it is quite sane for one to spend his whole life in talking or writing about this matter, unless he is continuously inspired, and I have not done so. A man may have other affairs to attend to. I do not wish to kill nor to be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both these things would be by me unavoidable.

(Thoreau, "John Brown," p. 702)

It is not so much, I think, that Thoreau, like his Transcendentalist friends, has altered. It is, rather, that the circumstances they encountered, the pressures and inspirations of movements for change, demanded of them new forms of action. For Thoreau knew, as he put it in the same speech, that "the sentiments of humanity" are never to be "found unaccompanied by its deeds" (p. 694). This is what Margaret Fuller discovered, first in her move to New York, then in her activism in Rome. To be sure, others retreated from their activism: Ripley, after the catastrophic fire at Brook Farm, returned to literary criticism and Channing to the Unitarian ministry. But we can watch as, through the 1840s and 1850s, each of these writers, Emerson included, struggled to find the ways in which the "sentiments of humanity" to which they gave expression might be translated into the deeds of the movements of their time.

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16

Melville, Whitman, and the Tribulations of Democracy

Betsy Erkkila

*The very bill made sacred by the blood of freedom's
earliest martyrs, is sold and trafficked for.*

Whitman, *New York Aurora*, 1842

But the Declaration of Independence makes a difference.

Melville to Evert Duyckinck, 1849

Walt Whitman and Herman Melville were both born in the state of New York in 1819, within two months of each other. In the year of their birth, the United States was entering the first of the periodic depressions that would characterize the modern industrial world. In the same year, James Tallmadge, Jr., a representative from New York, introduced an amendment to prohibit the extension of slavery into Missouri and to provide for the emancipation of those slaves who were already there. Although the immediate issue of slavery in Missouri was resolved by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which admitted Missouri as a slave state but prohibited slavery in the remainder of the Louisiana territory "forever," the debate over the Tallmadge amendment provoked a conflict between North and South so bitter and far-reaching that even Thomas Jefferson was led to predict disaster for the American republic: "All, I fear, do not see the speck on our horizon which is to burst on us as a tornado, sooner or later. The line of division lately marked out between different portions of our confederacy is such as will never, I fear, be obliterated" (Blum, 1981: 212). The conflict between North and South was intensified by the conflict between rich and poor, capital and labor, brought by the Panic of 1819. Emerging in the year that Whitman and Melville were born, these dark spots on the horizon of the American republic would become sources of major struggle in the lives and works of both writers and in the ensuing conflict over the very meaning and future of democracy not only in the Americas but throughout the world.

Loomings

Melville and Whitman came of age during the 1830s, a decade of intensified conflict and crisis over the revolutionary ideals of the founding and the American "experiment" with democracy. As the man who named the era before the Civil War, Andrew Jackson rose to power as a military hero who had defeated the Creek Indians and won the Battle of New Orleans against the British in the War of 1812. Jackson was elected President in 1828 on a Democratic party platform that emphasized "the people," democracy, states rights, free enterprise, and expansion westward. And yet, for all Jackson's democratic rhetoric of equality and the common man, as later historians have demonstrated, the Age of Jackson led to an increase rather than a close in the gap between labor and capital, an Indian Removal Policy that destroyed or displaced Native peoples, and an ideological commitment to America as a *white male* republic based on patriarchal paternalism and theories of racial and sexual difference.

The decade of the thirties was marked by an increasingly militant resistance to both federal power and the inhumane social conditions of slavery, capitalist industry, westward expansion, and patriarchal dominance. "[W]e (colored people of the United States) are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began," wrote David Walker in an *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), which urged blacks to revolt against their white masters and "kill or be killed" (Walker). Walker's call for God's justice and black liberation assumed palpable bodily form when, in August 1831, Nat Turner led the bloodiest slave insurrection in United States history in Southampton County, Virginia. The insurrection, which resulted in the death of sixty whites, the torture and execution of scores of innocent blacks, and a widespread hysteria about the possibility of further uprisings, led to a tightening of slave law and an increasingly vigorous defense of the institution and culture of slavery throughout the South.

During the thirties, the Sauk Chief Black Hawk and the Seminole Chief Osceola also led wars of resistance against Jackson's military campaign to remove Native Americans west of the Mississippi by force if necessary. South Carolina, under the leadership of John C. Calhoun, precipitated a major national crisis when the state declared recent national tariffs null and void. The South's growing resistance to national power and fear for the survival not only of slavery but a whole way of southern life were heightened by the emergence of an increasingly vocal and militant antislavery movement in the North. In 1831 William Lloyd Garrison began publishing *The Liberator*, a weekly newspaper dedicated to the immediate abolition of slavery and universal enfranchisement of blacks. A national Anti-Slavery Society was established in 1833, and by 1840, networks of antislavery societies had spread throughout the North. In 1836, striking women protested conditions at the Lowell factories in Massachusetts in songs that compared wage labor to slavery. A few years later, Sarah Grimké, one of the first white women to lecture publicly against slavery, also compared the condition of women under patriarchy to slavery in *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women* (1838), one of the first American pamphlets on the rights of women.

Despite differences among these resistance movements on behalf of African-Americans, Natives, women, workers, and states, they are united by a common return to the scene of Revolution and a common effort to reaffirm, renegotiate, or reject the legacy of the founding as defined by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Whereas Jackson presented his 1830 Indian Removal policy as a realization of the Revolutionary ideal of an “extensive Republic . . . filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion” (Second Annual Message to Congress, December 4, 1830, Smith, 1997: 236), the Cherokee Nation resisted their removal in the Revolutionary language of “rights,” citizenship, “consent,” and the sovereignty “of the great body of the Cherokee people” (Memorial and Protest of the Cherokee Nation, June 22, 1836, in Blum, 1981: 233). If Calhoun grounded his defense of nullification and secession in the sovereignty of the states before the Constitution, Jackson insisted that the states were bound by the Constitution as the supreme law of the land. John Quincy Adams appealed to the Declaration of Independence – the “law of nature and Nature’s God, on which our fathers placed our national existence” – in defending the right of slaves to revolt aboard the *Amistad* in 1839 (Rogin, 1979: 212), whereas Calhoun and later the proslavery apologist George Fitzhugh rejected the principles of the Declaration of Independence as “absurd” and “dangerous” (Fitzhugh, 2010). Slavery was “natural, normal, and necessitous,” Fitzhugh argued, compared with the enslavement of “free” workers “to the unfeeling despotism of capitalists, employers, usurers, and extortioners” (“Southern Thought” 1857). While capitalists defended the rights of liberty, property, and free enterprise individualism in the name of Revolutionary principle, George Lipard founded the national Brotherhood of the Union in 1850 to organize workers into a series of cooperatives modeled on the republican ideals of the founding.

As these varying and often contradictory interpretations of the founding ideology suggest, the social and political contests of the time were often played out as a conflict between the promise of the Declaration of Independence and the limits of the Constitution, between democratic rights and constitutional law. The political crisis of the antebellum years reopened the question of revolution, underscored the fictiveness of the “Union,” and produced a public political debate about democracy that enabled alternative and at times radically “other” reconstructions of the American republic to emerge. While the more radical reforms sought by laborers, blacks, women, Natives, socialists, free lovers, and communitarians were not taken up by the major political parties, they shaped the political public sphere and loomed as the phantom presence – the repressed *revolutionary will* and grand *what if* – of the antebellum imaginary.

Revolutionary Formations

As mariner and renegade ship worker and as journalist and Democratic party radical, Melville and Whitman were both raised on the Revolutionary ideals of the founding. Melville’s paternal grandfather, Thomas Melvill, was a member of the Boston

Tea Party; and his maternal grandfather, General Peter Gansevoort, had successfully defended Fort Stanwix against British and Indian attack during the Revolution. Although Melville's father Alan Melvill allied himself with Federalism and the business classes against what he called the "scurvy and ungrateful" masses (Rogin, 1979: 53), his uncle Peter Gansevoort was elected to the state legislature as Jacksonian Democrat in 1829, and in 1844 his oldest brother, Gansevoort, stumped throughout the west for Democratic presidential candidate James Polk on a platform of western expansion and Texas annexation.

Whitman's family had similarly deep roots in the Revolution and democratic party politics in the Age of Jackson. "They all espoused with ardor the side of the 'rebellion' in 76," Whitman said of his father's side of the family. In his daybooks, Whitman recorded instances of patriotism and heroism on both the maternal and paternal sides of his family during the British occupation of Long Island. Whitman's father Walter Whitman, Sr., was a free thinker and a radical Tom Paine democrat who subscribed to the *Free Inquirer*, edited by the socialists Frances Wright and Robert Owen, who sought through a rhetoric of a "war of class" to unite the grievances of New York city workers in an anticapitalist and anticlerical platform (Schlesinger, 1945: 183).

Although Melville came from a patrician and Whitman from a working-class family, both families suffered losses as a result of an increasingly volatile capitalist marketplace. Melville's father lost his import business in 1827 through overinvestment and died suddenly in 1832 depressed and half-mad. During the severe economic Panic of 1837, which lasted for seven long years, Melville's brother Gansevoort suffered financial losses that sent their entire family into genteel poverty. As a carpenter, Whitman's father mortgaged house after house as the Whitman family moved from the country to the city and back again in search of work. As a result, neither Whitman nor Melville had much formal schooling beyond their early years. Like whaling for Ishmael, journalism and politics for Whitman and the life of a renegade seaman and adventurer for Melville became their Harvard and their Yale.

Whitman learned his politics as a journalist and editor in the bustling and rumble tumble world of New York party politics; Melville learned his as a common sailor on merchant ships and whalers bound for the Pacific, where the democratic mixture of races and classes among ordinary sailors starkly contrasted with the authoritarian and rigidly hierarchical structures of life aboard ship in the nineteenth century. Although Whitman and Melville retreated from some of the more radical political movements of their time – including Abolition and Reconstruction – at their most utopian they were also paradoxically the most visionary and democratic of nineteenth-century canonical writers. For both, democracy was at once a national, a global, and a family affair. But while they were raised on similar Revolutionary traditions and shared a similarly utopian ideal of democracy grounded in homoerotic comradeship, labor, and love, they are also representative of the contradictory, antithetical, at times conservative and at other times radically alternative views of democracy that marked the political crisis of the nation before, during, and after the Civil War.

Body Politics

Whitman and Melville began their literary careers as popular writers. Like “The Child’s Champion” (1841), Whitman’s popular temperance novel, *Franklin Evans; or the Inebriate, A Tale of the Times* (1842), was published by the *New World*, a mass-circulation newspaper. Written “for the mass,” not “for the critics but for THE PEOPLE,” and framed by the language of sentimentalism and “Temperance Reform,” *Franklin Evans* seeks to teach the value of a “prudent, sober, and temperate course of life” as part of a broader movement of national republican regeneration (Whitman, 1842: 36, 37). And yet, as Michael Moon and Michael Warner have argued, in Whitman’s early temperance tales, the rhetoric of temperance reform functions as a fluid medium for voicing, at the same time that it condemns, a seductive urban underworld of male desire, pleasure, cruising, dissipation, same-sex eroticism, fluid identities, and border crossings that erode the illusory boundaries of class and identity, sex and blood.

Melville’s popular novel *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846) gives voice to a similarly potent intermingling of sex and democracy, bodily desire and fear. Both narratives suggest the fear of the excesses of the unruly body – the savage and primitive within – that lay just beneath the strident political rhetorics of liberty and equality during the Jacksonian era. The massive social and reformist effort to control the excesses of the savage body during the Age of Jackson is reflected not only in the campaigns against the Indians, but in the appeals to self-mastery and social control that underwrote the male purity movement, the anti-masturbation tracts, the temperance movement, the public education movement, and Protestant missions to such places as the South Pacific and the Hawaiian Islands.

Whereas Whitman made use of the temperance genre and the languages of personal and national regeneration to give voice to erotically charged fantasies of bodily excess and dissipation among men, Melville transformed the travel adventure genre into an X-rated story of the Typee Valley as a realm of pure freedom and bodily pleasure that satirizes the political and religious pieties of the Age of Jackson. Beginning with the narrator’s revolt against the arbitrary authority of a tyrannical ship captain, *Typee* is full of erotic images of naked and sexually inviting women, sparsely clad Native men who drink, smoke, and commune with each other at the Ti (a place that the narrator calls “a sort of Bachelor’s Hall” [157]), and a sensuous rhythm of life organized by the pleasures and desires of the body rather than the “civilized” virtues of labor, capital, religion, marriage, family, laws, and government. If Whitman’s *Franklin Evans* is an urban fantasy of erotic abandon among men that masquerades as a Jacksonian temperance tract, *Typee* is a Rousseauistic fantasy of pure sex and pure democracy – of “freedom from all restraint,” “equality of condition,” and “fraternal feeling” among the Typee islanders (185, 203) – that doubles as a trenchant political critique of the failures of democracy not only in America but worldwide. Linking the extermination of the tribes of North America with the future of “disease, vice, and premature death” that awaits the Typee Natives when Christian missionaries arrive within the next “few years” to “civilize”

them, the narrator complains: "The Anglo-Saxon hive have extirpated Paganism from the greater part of the North American continent; but with it they have likewise extirpated the greater portion of the Red race. Civilization is gradually sweeping from the earth the lingering vestiges of Paganism, and at the same time the shrinking forms of its unhappy worshippers" (195).

Although *Typee* and its sequel *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Sea* (1847) sold well and secured Melville's reputation as "a man who lived among the cannibals," they also angered American religious authorities and more orthodox readers by presenting United States and European missionaries as the advance guard of capitalist imperialism and enslavement. Challenging the savage/civilized binary and the barbarities committed in the name of Christianity and civilization by the French, British, and American colonizers in the Marquesas, Tahiti, and Hawaii, the narrator Tommo observes: "the small remnant of the natives had been civilized into draught horses, and evangelized into beasts of burden . . . They have been literally . . . harnessed to the vehicles of their spiritual instructors like so many brutes" (*Typee*, 196). But while Tommo turns the "savage" to a critique of civilization, like the specters of "tattooing" and "cannibalism" that haunt the final chapters of *Typee* and end with Tommo's flight from and killing of a Native in the name of "freedom," "Home," and "Mother" (248, 249), he expresses a fear of being absorbed by the Native – either permanently marked or literally consumed – that implicates him in the very acts of civilized violence his narrative deplures.

Unlike Melville, whose experiences in England, the South Pacific, and South America enabled him to see firsthand the dehumanizing global effects of the spread of capitalist industrialism and European and American imperialism, Whitman was more sanguine in his vision of westward expansion as part of a universal democratic advance toward liberation from the tyrannical orders of the past. Embracing the notion of "manifest destiny" set forth in the July 1845 issue of John O'Sullivan's *Democratic Review*, Whitman looked upon the "boundless democratic free West" as the ultimate site of America's democratic experiment and a means of resolving the increasing conflict between labor and capital in the cities of the East (*GF*: 1: 26). As editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Whitman – unlike Melville, but like Melville's brother Gansevoort – supported the expansionist policies of Polk, which resulted in the annexation of Texas in 1845, the acquisition of Oregon in 1846, and an illegal "executive" war with Mexico in 1846–7.

In a letter written to Gansevoort at the outset of the Mexican War, Melville mocked the local "delirium about the Mexican War" and the rhetoric of American expansion to "the 'Halls of Montezumas'" and beyond, "where our democratic rabble meant to 'make a night of it' ere long" and "canes made out of the Constitution's timbers be thought no more of than bamboos" (Melville, 1993: 40–1). Despite Melville's political irreverence, after the death of his brother Gansevoort in London, where he had been appointed secretary to the American legation as a reward for his service to the Democratic party, Melville himself entered the political fray on the side of the Democrats in 1847 when he wrote a series of satirical portraits of General Zachary Taylor entitled "Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack,'" published in *Yankee Doodle* as a special

correspondence from “the seat of War.” Like others in the Democratic party, Melville feared rightly that this military hero of the Mexican War was being groomed for the Whig Presidency without a single political idea.

The American 1848

“But seriously something great is impending,” Melville wrote in his 1846 letter to Gansevoort, describing the Mexican War as “a little spark” that would kindle “a great fire.” Envisioning the specter of mass carnage and a second American Revolution, “when the Battle of Monmouth will seem like child’s play” (Melville, 1993: 41), Melville’s words proved prophetic. The debate over the extension of slavery into the territories acquired by the United States through the conquest of Mexico led to a political crisis and breakdown as the linked issues of race, class, gender, labor, industry, capitalist expansion, and war exposed major contradictions in the ideology of the American republic. These contradictions and the ensuing struggle over the legitimacy of the Constitution and the meaning of American democracy culminated in a Civil War not only between individual, state, and national government but also between brother and brother, sister and sister on the common ground of the American republic itself.

A few weeks after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed with Mexico on February 2, 1848, a Revolutionary uprising of workers and students in Paris resulted in the abdication of King Louis Philippe, the declaration of a second French republic, and the spread of the revolution throughout Europe. These 1848 revolutions combined with the ongoing political struggle over freedom and slavery in the United States to intensify the more global dimensions and aspirations of the American 1848. Although the American 1848 did not manifest itself in an immediate act of violence against the state, the American Revolution of 1848 would be deferred until 1861, when it erupted into a scene of mass carnage and internecine Civil War more bloody than any before in history.

Under Whitman’s editorship, the *Eagle* was the first of the New York dailies to support Congressman David Wilmot’s 1846 proposal that slavery be forbidden in any new territory acquired by the United States. “Set Down Your Feet, Democrats!” Whitman declared in the December 21, 1846 issue: “let the Democratic members of Congress (and Whigs, too, if they like,) plant themselves . . . fixedly and without compromise, on the requirement that *Slavery be prohibited in them forever*” (Whitman 1921: 194). At a time when wage labor was becoming a new form of slavery, Whitman’s antislavery editorials bear the traces of labor movement radicalism in stressing the danger of the slave system to the rights and dignity of all laborers. In “American Workingmen, Versus Slavery,” he called upon workers to defend their rights so “that their calling shall *not* be sunk to the miserable level of what is little above brutishness – sunk to be like owned goods, and driven cattle!” (Whitman GF, 1: 209–10).

As the New York Democratic party split into proslavery extension Old Hunkers and free-soil Barnburners, Whitman “split off with the radicals” and lost his job as editor of

the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Whitman, PW 2: 288). Unlike Whitman, Melville's brother Allan and his uncle Peter Gansevoort remained loyal to the Old Hunkers and the national Democratic party when it nominated Lewis Cass, who opposed the Wilmot Proviso, to head the Democratic party ticket. Whereas Allan Melville ran for state office as a Democrat in 1848, in August 1848 Whitman was elected as a delegate to the Free-Soil convention in Buffalo, where he joined Barnburners, antislavery Whigs, and Abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, in nominating Martin Van Buren for the presidency on a platform of "Free Soil, free speech, free labor, and freemen."

The political crisis of 1848 in America and Europe marked a turning point in the life and work of Melville and Whitman, as each began to experiment with a variety of literary voices, modes, and forms as a prelude to writing what would become *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Leaves of Grass* (1855). By the summer of 1849 when Barnburners returned to the Democratic party fold, Whitman's began to move away from journalism and party politics toward poetry and oratory as the most effective means of reaching and radicalizing the American people in the democratic ideals of the founding. As the talk of secession mounted, Henry Clay of Kentucky introduced into the Senate a series of compromise resolutions, proposing the admission of California as a free state, a stricter Fugitive Slave Law, the extension of slavery into the new territory, and a prohibition of congressional interference with the interstate slave trade. The willingness of the Democratic party, the North, and especially Daniel Webster to support this 1850 compromise on the issue of slavery sent Whitman literally raging into verse.

Whitman's first free verse poems, "Blood Money," "House of Friends," and "Resurgemus," which were published in 1850, emerged out of the political passions aroused by slavery, free soil, and the European revolutions. Although the Revolutions of 1848 had been defeated, Whitman celebrated the ultimate triumph of liberty in "Resurgemus," the first of his early political poems to be included among the twelve untitled poems of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. Like "Blood Money" and "The House of Friends," "Resurgemus" breaks the pentameter and turns on the images of slavery and freedom. "Not a grave of those slaughtered ones, / But is growing its seed of freedom," Whitman wrote, linking the democratic struggle for freedom with the fluid, eternal processes of nature (EPF: 39). In his earliest extant notebook, dated 1847 but probably written in the early 1850s, Whitman also began to experiment with the idea of using poetry as a form of political action. When in his notebook Whitman broke for the first time into lines approximating the free verse of *Leaves of Grass*, the lines bear the impress of the slavery issue:

I am the poet of slaves, and of the masters of slaves
I am the poet of the body
And I am.

(Whitman, 1921, 2: 69)

The lines join or translate within the representative figure of the poet the conflicting terms of master and slave that threaten to split the Union. And yet, even in these trial

lines, the poet's grammar of democratic union appears to be short-circuited, like the political Union itself, by the fact of an economy of masters and slaves within the body of the republic.

Whereas Whitman's literary revolution began with an embrace of the Revolutions of 1848 and a break away from the proslavery politics of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and the Democratic party, Melville's revolt began with a declaration of independence from the book publishing industry and the slavery of the literary marketplace. At about the same time that news of the revolutions in Europe began to reach New York in March 1848, Melville announced to his British publisher, John Murray, that he planned to turn away from his "narrative of facts" toward "that play of freedom & invention accorded only to the Romancer & poet." "[C]ramped & fettered" by the expectations of the literary marketplace and "longing to plume [his] pinions for a flight," he declares that he has embarked on "something new" and "original" – "a story wild enough I assure you & with a meaning too." Setting America against England in this declaration – "You make miracles of what are commonplaces to us" – he refuses to provide "documentary evidence" for his adventures in the South Pacific as they are recounted in *Typee* and *Omoo*. "I will give no evidence," he asserts: "Truth is mighty & will prevail" (Melville, 1993: 106, 107)

Although *Mardi and a Voyage Thither* (1849) began as another sea narrative in the popular mode of *Typee* and *Omoo*, following the Revolutions of 1848, and perhaps under the influence of the democratic and nationalist aspirations of the Young America movement and the example of his own family's active involvement in the American Revolution and the political crisis of the time, Melville transformed his "adventures in the Pacific" into an experimental quest narrative that anticipates the multilayered symbolics of *Moby-Dick* and his later works in its mixture of voices, modes, and perspectives – satirical and metaphysical, American and global, historical and literary, political and self-reflexively aesthetic. Melville's declaration of imaginative independence also freed him to become a romancer of contemporary politics by incorporating into *Mardi*, which was dedicated to his brother Allan, an extensive political allegory on the Revolutions of 1848 and the crisis of democracy in America and Europe.

Like Whitman's political poems of the early 1850s, Melville's chapters on the United States (Vivenza) focus on the paradox of liberty and slavery in a republican state. An inscription at the entrance to Vivenza reads: "In this republican land all men are born free and equal." But beneath it in "very minute" print is an ironic postscript: "Except the tribe of Hamo" (Melville, 1970: 512, 513). "We are all kings here; royalty breathes in the common air," the inhabitants boast, but their "great Temple of Freedom" is built by slaves and traversed by "collared menials" with "stripes" on their backs to match the stripes on the republic's flag. And yet, while *Mardi* sympathizes with the plight of slaves and their right of revolution – "'Tis right to fight for freedom, whoever be the thrall," asserts the poet Yoomy – an anonymous scroll, presumably the voice of wisdom and the "gods," cautions against the excesses of both republicanism and revolution: "Now, though far and wide, to keep equal pace with the times, great

reforms of a verity, be needed; nowhere are bloody revolutions required . . . For evil is the chronic malady of the universe; and checked in one place, breaks forth in another" (Melville, 1970: 533, 529).

The failure of *Mardi* to sell forced Melville to return to his semi-autobiographical sea narratives in his next two novels, *Redburn: His First Voyage* (1849) and *White-Jacket; or The World in a Man-of-War* (1850). Although he regarded writing these books as forms of "forced" labor "done for money" (Melville, 1993: 138), he continued to experiment with ways of conjoining a saleable adventure story with his desire to speak truth about the world, including the world of contemporary politics and the bonds of affection between men. "But the Declaration of Independence makes a difference," he wrote his friend Evert Duyckinck in the spring of 1849, associating the Declaration not only with political rights and a break from England but with imaginative and bodily freedom – a break away from the "muzzle" that "intercepted Shakespeare's full articulations" and the fear of democratic sociality and the body ("belly") that prevents Emerson from "munching a plain cake in company of jolly fellows, & swiging off his ale like you & me" (Melville, 1993: 122).

Redburn, which is dedicated to Melville's brother Thomas, gives voice to an affirming vision of democracy, commerce, and world union that echoes the Jacksonian politics of the Melville family, at the same time that it reveals the intertwined rhetorics of democratic idealism and capitalist imperialism that have marked and continue to mark the domestic and foreign policies of the United States. *Redburn* envisions Liverpool as "an epitome of the world" with each ship representing "the tribe to which it belongs": "Here, under the beneficent sway of the Genius of Commerce, all climes and countries embrace; and yard-arm touches yard-arm in brotherly love" (Melville, 1969: 165). His sight of Germans awaiting passage to New York leads him to a utopian evocation of America as world: "Settled by people of all nations, all nations may claim her for their own" (Melville, 1969: 169). But *Redburn's* democratic idealism is undercut by the material reality of a world driven by commerce, capitalism, and economic self-interest as signified by his "soul-sickening" encounter with a "crouching" mother and her three "shrunken" children left to die of hunger in a hole in Liverpool and the horrors of famine, cholera, and death suffered by the German emigrants in their passage to America (Melville, 1969: 180). *Redburn's* erotic comradeship with the "feminine" and sweet-voiced Harry Bolton appears to offer an alternative to the scenes of human misery he encounters on land and at sea, but even Harry is cast out by *Redburn* at the end of the story when they arrive in New York.

In *White Jacket* the ideals of democracy and the bonds of affection between men are set against the feudal practice of flogging in the American Navy as a violation of the "broad principles of political liberty and equality" set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution (Melville, 1970: 144). For the common sailor, "stripped like a slave" and "scourged worse than a hound" for "all degrees of transgression" in accord with the Navy's *Articles of War*, says the protagonist White Jacket, "our Revolution was in vain; to him our Declaration of Independence is a lie" (Melville,

1970: 138, 139, 144). Although *White Jacket* focuses on the humiliating and life-scarring practice of flogging aboard a “Man-of-War,” at a time when the struggle over slavery in the United States was threatening to rend the Union, the *whip* also serves as a politically charged symbol not only of slavery, but all forms of arbitrary authority that oppress sailors, slaves, laborers, women, colonials, the body, and – perhaps most significantly for Melville and Whitman – men who love men.

At the center of *White Jacket* is the question of revolution, a question that was at the center of the political crisis of the time, as slaves asserted their right to revolt against masters (Douglass), individuals asserted their right to revolt against the state (Thoreau), women asserted their right to revolt against patriarchy (Fuller), states asserted their right to revolt against the national government (Calhoun), and workers asserted their right to revolt against capital (France). *White Jacket* comes closer to advocating revolution than any other novel that Melville wrote. Citing Blackstone and Justinian in support of the higher “Law of Nature,” *White Jacket* asserts: “every American man-of-war’s-man would be morally justified in resisting the scourge to the uttermost; and, in so resisting, would be religiously justified in what would be judicially styled ‘the act of mutiny’ itself” (Melville, 1970: 145). When *White Jacket* is himself about to be unjustly flogged by Captain Claret, he feels an instinct to rebel against “an insulted and unendurable” existence by killing both the Captain and himself – a murder and suicide that are only averted by the intervention of two of the crew members on his behalf.

In the end, the isolation and loneliness of the individual are overcome by *White Jacket*’s loss of the jacket and the comradeship he finds with Jack Chase and other main-top-men, a comradeship that *White Jacket* associates with the Christian and democratic millennium of world peace and justice: “We main-top-men are all aloft in the top; and round our mast we circle, a brother-band, hand in hand, all spliced together. We have reefed the last top-sail; trained the last gun; blown the last match; bowed to the last blast; been tranced in the last calm” (Melville, 1970: 396). But while this “brother-band” resists the structures of bodily and sexual discipline signified by the Captain’s determination to shave their beards and hair – an attack on their very “manhood,” Jack Chase proclaims – in the end they all “succumb” (Melville, 1970: 361, 360). Perhaps afraid to offend his readers with a novel that appears to affirm the right of revolution and an alternative social order grounded in communality and love between men – Melville too succumbs in the end by having his narrator assert that salvation is individual rather than collective. “[W]hatever befall us,” *White Jacket* urges at the end of the novel, “let us never train our murderous guns inboard; let us not mutiny with bloody pikes in our hands” (Melville, 1970: 400). Rather than righting “unredressed” wrongs through collectivity and resistance, the man-of-war world must await the interposition of God as “Our Lord High Admiral” (Melville, 1970: 400). Whereas Whitman’s political poems of 1850 urge resistance to slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law in the United States and resistance to all forms of tyranny and enslavement throughout the world, even in his most radical novel Melville appears to support the Democratic politics of his family in urging patience and compromise

on the issues of both slavery and resistance in order to preserve the authority of law against “the unbounded insurrection” he appears to fear in both body and body politic (Melville, 1970: 359).

Epics of Democracy

“Whitman rode through the years undisturbed by such deep and bitter truths as Melville had found,” wrote F.O. Matthiessen in *American Renaissance* (1941: 179). And yet, in the early 1950s when Melville and Whitman turned toward the work of writing their prose and poetic epics of American democracy, both shared an essentially tragic vision of the slave system as a trope for America itself, the sign of a culture of abundance propelled not by the revolutionary dream of freedom but by the economics of market capitalism. The scholarly emphasis on the essential differences between Melville and Whitman has kept us from recognizing the similarly democratic and dystopian impulses out of which their work emerged, and the ways their imaginative writings overlap and intersect in their struggle to come to terms with the political and economic tribulations of democracy in the mid-nineteenth century.

“While we are rapidly preparing for that political supremacy among nations, which prophetically awaits us at the close of the present century; in a literary point of view, we are deplorably unprepared for it,” Melville wrote in an 1850 review of Nathaniel Hawthorne that reveals his own aspiration to become “the literary Shiloh of America” (Melville, 2002: 531). Melville calls on Americans “to carry republican progressiveness into Literature, as well as into Life,” in words that echo the nationalist rhetoric of the Young America movement that he shared with Whitman. “The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature,” Whitman declared in the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*. “Here are the roughs and beards and space and ruggedness and nonchalance that the soul loves” (Whitman, 1955: 5).

Melville’s effort to become part of what he called the “shared” literary “fullness and overflowing” of his times was hindered by his experience of genteel poverty and enslavement to the capitalist marketplace. “Dollars damn me,” he confessed to Hawthorne while he was completing *Moby-Dick*. “What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, – it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot” (Melville 1968: 191). In *Moby-Dick; or The Whale* (1851), Melville seeks to straddle the contradiction between capitalist marketplace and democratic art by conjoining the popularity of *Typee* with the experimental poetics of *Mardi*. Like the voyage of the *Pequod*, *Moby-Dick* is propelled by a double impulse: it is both whaling adventure and metaphysical quest, epic of democracy and work of high art.

The narrative fluidity of *Moby-Dick*, the ways the first-person narrator floats in and out of view, sometimes surfacing as the voice of Ishmael and sometimes submerged in the voice of an apparently omniscient narrator, creates a doubleness of perspective and an ironic inflection that counters the more specifically nationalist, democratic, and affirming dimensions of the narrative. In the “Knights and Squires” chapters of

the book (chapters 26 and 27), for example, Ishmael appears to give voice to Melville's defense of whaling and the whaleman as the "aesthetically noble" subject of his democratic epic: "But this august dignity I treat of, is not the dignity of kings and robes, but that abounding dignity which has no robed investiture. Thou shalt see it shining in the arm that wields a pick or drives a spike; that democratic dignity which, on all hands, radiates without end from God . . . The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!" (Melville, 2002: 103). On the nether side of Ishmael's voice, however, looms a less sanguine and more critical omniscient narrator who appears to undermine and ironize the contemporary rhetorics of Jacksonian democracy, labor radicalism, millennial Christianity, literary nationalism, and global revolution that the passage exudes.

Ishmael's democratic excess and its potentially ironic inflection are particularly evident in his subsequent epic invocation to the "great democratic God":

If, then, to meanest mariners, and renegades and castaways, I shall hereafter ascribe high qualities, though dark; weave round them tragic graces . . . if I shall touch that workman's arm with some ethereal light . . . then against all mortal critics bear me out in it, thou just Spirit of Equality, which hast spread one royal mantle of humanity over all my kind! Bear me out in it, thou great democratic God . . . Thou who didst pick up Andrew Jackson from the pebbles; who didst hurl him upon a war-horse; who didst thunder him higher than a throne!

(Melville, 2002: 103–4)

Ishmael invokes the "just Spirit of Equality" in support of a democratic poetics that weaves "tragic graces" around workers and renegades and celebrates the myth of democratic possibility represented by Andrew Jackson's rise from commoner, to warrior, to President. But the passage also reveals a problem with the imperial will unleashed by democracy. If Jackson came to power by defeating the British at New Orleans, his heroism was also grounded in a policy of war, violence, and subjugation of Native Americans. Hurling "higher than a throne" by a democratic God whose own acts seem less "just" than warlike and imperial, the figure of Jackson suggests that the problem with democracy may lie inside rather than outside democratic ideology itself: the unencumbered self at the heart of liberal democratic theory leads not to liberation but enslavement, the subjection of the many to the totalitarian will of the one – as signified by the imperial rise of Napoleon Bonaparte in Europe and Andrew Jackson as new monarch in America. Or, as Ishmael's invocation to democracy appears to forewarn, Ahab as totalitarian master/monster aboard the *Pequod*.

As a fictional embodiment of the best and the worst in liberal democratic ideology, Ahab is at once a heroic and a tragic figure. "Who's over me?" he declares, in his Promethean quest to conquer evil and find out the meaning of the universe (140). Although Ahab has his "humanities" – he sees the values of home and hearth in Starbuck's eyes and he takes hold of Pip's hand in an act of sympathetic identification with the outcast slave – he ends by destroying not only the ship of America as ship of the

world but the very possibility of liberal freedom represented by its global and multi-racial crew of “mariners, and renegades and castaways.”

As the symbolism of the doubloon as “naval” of the *Pequod* suggests, for Melville as for Karl Marx, the logic of democracy is inextricably bound up with the imperial logic of capital. The specter of imperial capital that haunts the revolutionary dream of freedom in *Moby-Dick* receives its fullest articulation in “Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish,” a chapter in which Ishmael’s description of the two laws that govern the American whaling industry – “A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it” and “A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it” – leads to a reflection on *the law of possession* as fundamental to “all human jurisprudence.” “What are the sinews and souls of Russian serfs, and Republican slaves but Fast-Fish, whereof possession is the whole of the law?” Ishmael asks at the outset of what is, in effect, Melville’s most sustained critique of a contemporary political world in which slaves, widows, waifs, starving families, “hundreds of thousands of broken-backed laborers,” “poor Ireland,” and Texas are no more than “Fast-Fish” within a capitalist order of “Possession” (Melville, 2002: 302–3). Turning to the “kindred” but more “internationally and universally applicable” “doctrine of Loose-Fish,” Ishmael concludes by locating the rise of the American republic and the “Rights of Man” within a more global order of imperialist *possession*:

What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish. . . . What Poland to the Czar? What Greece to the Turk? What India to England? What at last will Mexico be to United States? All Loose Fish? . . .

What are the Rights of Man and the Liberties of the World but Loose-Fish? What all men’s minds and opinions but Loose-Fish? . . . What is the great globe itself but a Loose-Fish? And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?

(Melville, 2002: 310)

Without any mediating forms of social community, attachment, or love, the autonomous individuals liberated and empowered by Lockean theory and the Revolutionary enlightenment become symbolic Ishmaels – orphans and outcasts of a universe whose rights, liberties, and very thoughts are both “Loose-Fish” and “Fast-Fish, too” within a global order of capitalist and imperial dominance in which “possession is the whole of the law” (Melville, 2002: 309).

This grim reading of the imperial logic of unleashed individualism is set against the promise of democratic community bodied forth in the interracial, cross-cultural, and same-sex “marriage” of Ishmael and Queequeg and the utopian vision of erotic comradeship in “A Squeeze of the Hand.” In this chapter the “business” of sperm squeezing merges into a fantasy of baptismal deliverance as Ishmael imagines crew members squeezing sperm and each other in communal and masturbatory acts of labor and love:

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and

I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget.

(Melville, 2002: 322–3)

Like the similarly masturbatory fantasy at the center of Whitman's "Song of Myself," the sexually fluid and masturbatory image of men merging and coming together – "let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness" – is at the very center of Melville's vision of social community and the possibility of democracy in *Moby-Dick*.

"Would that I could keep squeezing sperm for ever!" Ishmael exclaims in a passage that sets the "attainable felicity" of domestic life and wife against the fantasy of squeezing sperm "eternally":

I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country; *now that I have perceived all this*, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti.

(Melville, 2002: 323; emphasis added)

Although this passage is usually read as a scene of renunciation in which Ishmael – and implicitly Melville – gives up his love for men in favor of the safer normative life of the shore, as my italicization suggests, the passage appears to say just the opposite: *Now* that Ishmael has "perceived" the social need to "lower, or at least shift" his erotic desire from man to woman, fantasy to reality, open sea to domestic shore, *now* that he has *perceived all this*, he is even more "ready" to "keep squeezing that sperm for ever" in loving union with his co-laborers and fellow seamen.

As "A Squeeze" suggests, at his most democratic and utopian, Melville sounds uncannily like Whitman. In fact, Ishmael's sentimental fantasy of workers "universally" squeezing "hands all around" in "the very milk and sperm of kindness" anticipates Whitman's baptismal vision of naked sleepers floating "hand in hand over the whole earth from east to west" in "The Sleepers" (Whitman, 1955: 114). And yet here as elsewhere in Melville's work, dreams of erotic comradeship are always momentary rather than enduring. "[T]here is some truth" in "[t]his 'all' feeling," Melville wrote to Hawthorne in one of his most Whitmanian passages: "You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head. This is the *all* feeling. But what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion" (Melville, 1993: 194). Whereas Whitman's homoerotic "*all feeling*" became the base of his democratic faith and vision, Melville's dream of erotic comradeship is itself immersed in the flow of capital and slavery, as instanced by the fact that Ishmael's vision of homoerotic community is produced by and within labor for capital. The possibility of democratic, bodily, and erotic freedom signified by

“A Squeeze” (chapter 94) is set against the phallic power of the whale’s penis in “The Cassock” (chapter 95) and the satanic “hell-fired” vision of Ahab, who drives both the dream of democracy and the ship of the world toward destruction in the concluding pages of the narrative.

Or not. Ishmael survives on the coffin life-buoy of his comrade Queequeq. As a biblical descendant of Hagar the servant of Abraham and thus at least a figurative slave, Ishmael may represent some renewed possibility of liberation and democracy. But Ishmael also bears the burden of the crew’s failure to revolt and thus the failure of revolutionary tradition and the collective will of the workers in the present. Like the failure of the American people to revolt against either the spread of slavery into the territories or the imperial will of capitalism in its advance across the country to the Pacific and beyond, Ishmael survives the failure of the revolutionary dream in the “Epilogue,” but “only” as “another orphan.” We do not know the meaning of that survival; and neither did Melville or America. Amid the disputes over the very survival of the American republic and its “experiment” with democracy in the late forties and early fifties, Melville and American democracy were themselves outcasts and orphans, or in Melville’s phrase “Loose-Fish,” of the revolutionary dreams of the fathers.

Like *Moby-Dick*, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* emerged out of a sense of apocalyptic gloom about the prospect of democracy in America. “Nations sink by stages, first one thing and then another,” Whitman wrote in one of his antislavery lectures while he was working on the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. By the summer of 1854, the capture and return of the fugitive slave Anthony Burns in the Revolutionary city of Boston – an event Whitman ironized in the 1855 poem “A Boston Ballad” – was only one of a number of signs that the American republic had become “cadaverous as a corpse” (Whitman, 1964: *WWW* 82). Before the Burns case, there had been the controversy over the Wilmot Proviso, the Compromise of 1850, and the provisions of the new Fugitive Slave Law. In 1850 in New York City, striking workers had for the first time been killed by police in a labor dispute. There had been factionalism, sectional rivalry, and betrayal in the Democratic party; and in the presidential election of 1852, both Franklin Pierce, the Democratic candidate, and Winfield Scott, the Whig candidate, supported the politics of compromise. In May 1854, with the endorsement of President Pierce, Congress passed the Kansas–Nebraska Act, which annulled the Missouri Compromise and opened the territories to the extension of slavery. At the same time, after a brief period of prosperity, the nation was plunged once again into economic depression.

Whereas Melville located the problem of democracy within the logic of democratic freedom itself, Whitman like Lincoln and the newly emergent Republican party called for a return to the Declaration of Independence and a more revolutionary commitment to the ideals of democracy. The publication of *Leaves of Grass* on or about July 4, 1855, represented an act of revolution, an attempt to regenerate nation and world in the ideals of liberty and social union upon which the American republic had been founded. The poet’s experience of the “*all-feeling*” of (homo)erotic union at the outset of the initially untitled “Song of Myself,” the first and longest poem in the 1855 *Leaves*, is not

“temporary” as in Melville’s *Moby-Dick* but at the very center of the vision of democracy that would inform all of his work:

I mind how we lay in June, such a transparent summer morning;
 You settled your head athwart my hips and gently turned over upon me,
 And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my
 barestript heart,
 And reached till you felt my beard, and reached till you held my feet.
 Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and joy and knowledge that
 pass all the art and argument of the earth.

(Whitman, 1955: 29)

The democratic knowledge that the poet receives and gives of a universe bathed in an erotic force that joins God, men, women, and the natural world is linked with the ecstasy of same-sex love among and between men. As in the “Twenty-eight young men,” “Thruster holding me tight,” and “Is this then a touch?” sequences of “Song of Myself,” scenes of sexual and orgasmic pleasure with another man, with twenty-eight young men, with the “voluptuous coolbreathed earth,” or with oneself become the source of political and spiritual vision – the ideal of equity and balance in self, nation, and cosmos toward which the poem moves (Whitman, 1955: 34, 45, 53, 85).

Like Whitman, Melville identified himself as a “social plebeian,” and in a letter written to Hawthorne at the time he was completing *Moby-Dick*, he declared his belief in “political equality,” that “a thief in jail is as honorable a personage as Gen. George Washington.” But he also admitted the patrician limits of what he called “my ruthless democracy on all sides”: “It seems an inconsistency to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind – in the mass” (Melville, 1993: 190–1). Whereas Melville fears the unleashed energies of the masses, Whitman merges with the turbulent and unruly masses in his act of poetic self-naming:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos
 Disorderly fleshy and sensual . . . eating drinking and breeding,
 No sentimentalist . . . no stander above men or women or apart from them
 . . . no more modest than immodest.

(Whitman, 1955: 48)

By naming himself as “one of the roughs” and by celebrating his disorderly and sensual nature in an unpunctuated sequence that mirrors the unruly flow of the senses, Whitman’s poet encompasses those very qualities of disorder and intemperance most feared by the critics of democracy. “I speak the password primeval . . . I give the sign of democracy,” Whitman writes, linking the democratic “sign” that the poet gives with giving public voice to the socially marginalized and sexually repressed (Whitman, 1955: 48).

At the center of Whitman's democratic epic is a scene of masturbation that associates self-touching with same-sex love and other forms of non-reproductive sexuality between men:

Is this then a touch? . . . quivering me to a new identity,
Flames and ether making a rush for my veins,
Tracherous tip of me reaching and crowding to help them,
My flesh and blood playing out lightning, to strike what is hardly different from
Myself,
On all sides prurient provokers stiffening my limbs,
Straining the udder of my heart for its withheld drip.

(Whitman, 1955: 53)

Stimulated and stiffened by the "treacherous" fingertips of himself, or another who is "hardly different from myself," the poet loses bodily balance and the balance between self and other, body and soul that is part of his democratic posture. Whereas "A Squeeze of the Hand" represents a moment of democratic and visionary bliss amid scenes of gothic terror and blood revenge, the touch sequence is presented in the politically charged language of a mass insurrection in which touch, as the "red marauder," usurps the governance of the body:

No consideration, no regard for my draining strength or my anger,
Fetching the rest of the herd around to enjoy them awhile,
Then all uniting to stand on a headland and worry me.

The sentries desert every other part of me,
They have left me helpless to a red marauder,
They all come to the headland to witness and assist against me.
I am given up by traitors;
I talk wildly . . . I have lost my wits . . . I and nobody else am the greatest traitor,
I went myself first to the headland . . . my own hands carried me there.

(Whitman, 1955: 54)

At a time of widespread fear of mass insurrection, slave revolt, and civil war, the poet's "worry" in this passage is both personal and political. The entire sequence links the turbulence of a sexually unruly body with the danger of what Melville called "ruthless democracy on all sides." And it is on the level of sex and the body that the poem tests the democratic theory of the American republic.

Whitman symbolically resolves the bodily crisis of his protagonist by linking the onslaught of touch – as a sign of unruliness in body and body politic – with the regenerative energies of the universe:

You villain touch! What are you doing? . . . my breath is tight in its throat;
Unclench your floodgates! You are too much for me.

Blind loving wrestling touch! Sheathed hooded sharptoothed touch!
Did it make you ache so leaving me?

Parting tracked by arriving . . . perpetual payment of perpetual loan,
Rich showering rain, and recompense richer afterward.

Sprouts take and accumulate . . . stand by the curb prolific and vital,
Landscapes projected masculine full-sized and golden.

(Whitman, 1955: 54)

The moment of sexual release is followed by a restoration of balance as the ejaculatory flow merges with and is naturalized as the regenerative flow of the universe. Within this regenerative economy (homo)erotic touching is safe and natural, quivering the poet not to a new and marginal identity as sunken-eyed onanist in heteronormative America but toward an experience of cosmic generativity – “masculine full-sized and golden.”

The drama of self and community, the one and the many is completed in images of Christ-like triumph over scenes of human suffering, injustice, and defeat in the history of nation and world: “I troop forth replenished with supreme power, one of an average unending procession,” the poet declares, spreading the hope of democratic regeneration “over the whole earth” (Whitman, 1955: 69). Whereas Melville worries about the tragedy of the imperial will at the very sources of the American democracy (Is Whitman Ahab?), Whitman celebrates the “supreme power” and “unending procession” of a democratic and erotic will that flows up to Canada and down to Mexico in its desire to “pass the boundaries” and encompass the whole world.

And yet even in the final celebratory passages of “Song of Myself,” Whitman’s poet registers some of Melville’s doubts about the future of democracy as he imagines humanity, liberated from classical restraint and Christian humility, blinded and desecrated by a capitalist orgy of “buying or taking or selling”:

Here and there with dimes on the eyes walking,
To feed the greed of the belly the brains liberally spooning,
Tickets buying or taking or selling, but in to the feast never once going;
Many sweating and ploughing and thrashing, and then the chaff for payment receiving,
A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.

(Whitman, 1955: 73)

As in Melville’s “Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish” chapter, the specter of a newly oppressive reign of capitalist “possession” – with “A few idly owning” and the “Many sweating and ploughing and thrashing, and then the chaff for payment receiving” – is at the root of a more tragic vision of the future of democracy Whitman shared with Melville, and, one might add, Karl Marx.

“Do I contradict myself?” Whitman asks in the concluding sequence of the poem; “Very well then. . . I contradict myself; / I am large. . . I contain multitudes.” His words sum up his effort to “contain” signs of dissension, contradiction, and doubt within the expansive body of the poet in order to affirm the poem’s final message of democratic hope and progress:

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death . . . it is form and union and plan . . . it is eternal life
. . . it is happiness.

(Whitman, 1955: 85)

Unlike Melville, whose democratic epic concludes with the specter of shipwreck and apocalypse, Whitman’s epic poet bequeaths the final power of democratic creation to the *you* of the reader and the open road of a future he textualizes by the absence of any mark of punctuation at the end of the poem: “I stop some where waiting for you”.

The Fractured State

Melville returned to the scene of Revolution in his novels and short stories of the mid-fifties not, like Whitman, to regenerate nation and world in the possibilities of democracy but to explore the nagging ironies, contradictions, and delusions of the Revolutionary heritage. In *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (1852), he imagines the tragic consequences for an idealistic young man – “a thorough-going Democrat” – who seeks to live in accord with the principles of Revolutionary and Christian virtue embodied by a putatively heroic but in fact savage tradition of fathers whose aristocratic and class pretensions – grounded in the conquest of Natives, enslavement of Africans, and sexual philandering in the New World – have given rise to the religious and political hypocrisies of the present. Melville carried on this critique of the failure of Revolutionary and Christian idealism in a series of short stories that present a bleak vision of worker alienation on Wall Street (“Bartleby, the Scrivener”), dehumanized and desexualized women enslaved to machines in a New England factory (“The Tartarus of Maids”), and the origins of the Americas in scenes of colonization and violence (“The Encantadas”).

In *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*, Melville rewrote the life of a Revolutionary soldier, whose obscure autobiography was published in 1824, to highlight the failure of the American Revolution to produce the freedom, rights, and happiness of a common man who fought heroically against the British at Bunker Hill and elsewhere, and in whose name the Revolution was putatively undertaken. Exiled for forty years as a pauper in industrial England – like Israel in Egypt – Potter returns to the “Promised Land” of America on the July 4, 1826 to find that the Revolutionary rhetorics of “happiness and plenty, in which the lowliest shared” do not include him (Melville, 1982: 166). In extensive fictionalized sketches of Benjamin Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Ethan Allen, Melville suggests that these “types” of America may in fact have

been self-seeking and possibly half-cracked rebels whose acts of defiance do not extend beyond advancing their own self-interests. In fact, for Melville even more than for Whitman, whose great-grandfather served under Jones and whose crisis of democratic faith in "Song of Myself" is preceded by an account of the battle between Jones's *Bon-Homme Richard* and the British *Serapis*, John Paul Jones is a disturbing presence. He embodies the Revolutionary origins and possible future of America in piracy, theft, and an orgy of blood: "intrepid, unprincipled, reckless, predatory, with boundless ambition, civilized in externals but a savage at heart, America is, or may yet be, the Paul Jones of nations" (1982: 120).

In "Benito Cereno" (1855) Melville extended his critique of the economic, racial, sexual, and class ideologies that undermine the possibilities of democracy to the transatlantic commerce in human bodies that linked Africa, Europe, and the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Based on Amasa Delano's published account of a slave revolt that took place aboard the Spanish slave trader *Tryal* in 1805, "Benito Cereno" is haunted by the spectral presence of other slave revolts in the Americas, including the insurrection led by Toussaint L'Ouverture in San Domingo in 1791–1804, and more recent slave rebellions aboard the *Amistad* in 1839 and the *Creole* in 1841. Melville locates his story of slave revolt aboard the *San Dominick* within the commercial and imperial networks of the international slave trade and the proslavery ideologies and racist psychology that make this prosperous trade in "living freight" possible. The story turns on the ironic failure of the American Amasa Delano to read the signs of slave revolution because he is blinded by the socially imposed taxonomies of racial and sexual difference: the Anglo-Saxon race is, in his view, superior to Africans who are ideally suited to be slaves, "negresses" who make natural mammies, and Spaniards who are by nature effeminate and treacherous. As the leader of the revolt, the physically slight Babo counters proslavery and racist ideologies of black "docility," "unaspiring contentment," and "blind attachment" (Melville 1987: 84) with the intellectually imposing presence of a black man who, even in defeat and death, projects a revolutionary will to overthrow white mastery in the New World: "The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites" (Melville, 1987: 116).

Whereas Melville's stories of the 1850s sought to raise the veil of history on the common men and women and slaves betrayed by the American Revolution, Whitman aspired to take his message directly to the people in a political pamphlet entitled *The Eighteenth-Presidency!*, which was probably begun amid the controversy over the Fugitive Slave Law and the Kansas–Nebraska Act in the early 1850s, and completed in the heat of the presidential campaign of 1856. Subtitled "Voice of Walt Whitman to Each Young Man in the Nation, North, South, East, and West," the pamphlet calls for the abolition of slavery through the spontaneous action of the people from below: "You young men! American mechanics, farmers, boatmen, manufacturers, and all work-people of the South, the same as the North! You are either to abolish slavery, or it will abolish you" (110 *WWW*; Whitman, 1982: 1322). In the closing passages of his antislavery appeal, Whitman locates the struggle against slavery in the United

States not as an isolated event but, in the spirit of 1848, as part of a more global war for democracy: "On all sides tyrants tremble, crowns are unsteady, the human race restive, on the watch for some better era, some divine war. No man knows what will happen next, but all know that some such things are to happen as mark the greatest moral convulsions of the earth" (*WWW*, 1982: 113).

The 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass* is shaped by a similar desire to recall the people to the ideals of the Revolution. "Remember the organic compact of These States! / Remember the pledge of the Old Thirteen thenceforward to the rights, life, liberty, equality of man!" Whitman wrote in "Poem of Remembrance for a Girl or a Boy of These States" (Whitman, 1856: 275). But beneath the affirmation of a "simple, compact, well-joined scheme" in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (Whitman, 1856: 211) and the global democratic embrace of "Salut Au Monde!" is a barely concealed hysteria that self and world may be coming apart at the seams. The sources of the poet's anxiety surface in "Respondez," the only new poem to address directly the political landscape of 1856. Like Melville in his works of the mid-fifties, Whitman tears away the veils of the republican myth to expose a topsy-turvy world in which the virtuous American republic envisioned by the Revolutionary founders has dissolved into a mass of historical contradictions:

Let freedom prove no man's inalienable right! Every one who can tyrannize, let
him tyrannize to his satisfaction!

Let there be money, business, railroads, imports, exports, custom, authority,
precedents, pallor, dyspepsia, smut, ignorance, unbelief!

Let the white person tread the black person under his heel! (Say! which is trodden
under heel, after all?)

(Whitman, 1856: 318–21)

"O seeming! seeming! seeming!" Whitman exclaimed toward the end of the poem as he edged ever-closer to Melville's ambiguities and the nihilistic vision of *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*. In this 1857 novel, Melville evokes man and nation as part of an absurd drama of fraud and masquerade presided over not by Ishmael's "great democratic God" but by God as cosmic joker and conman. "Life is a pic-nic *en costume*," declares the cosmopolitan at the center of the novel; "one must take a part, assume a character, stand ready in a sensible way to play the fool."

As *The Confidence-Man*, "Respondez," and other works by Melville and Whitman suggest, both experienced a period of intense depression in the late fifties. While the sources of this depression were personal and financial, it also corresponded with a deepening political crisis over democracy, slavery, and union and a severe economic depression in 1857 which lasted for two years. During these years, Melville stopped writing and sought unsuccessfully to earn a living as a public lecturer. Although he wrote poems in "private," he did not publish another book until after the Civil War. With the exception of *Billy Budd*, which was published posthumously, he turned away from fiction writing for the remainder of his life.

During these same years of political and economic crisis, Whitman, too, flirted with the idea of withdrawal from the public political sphere. In a sheaf of twelve unpublished poems written between 1858 and 1859 entitled "Live Oak, with Moss," he expressed his desire to give up his role as democratic poet in order to pursue a love affair with a man: "I can be your singer of songs no longer," he writes; "I am indifferent to my own songs – I am to go with him I love, and he is to go with me" (Bowers, 1955: 80, 82).

But unlike Melville, Whitman chose against the path of public renunciation. Rather, and in some sense quite extraordinarily, he turned in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass* toward an effort to resolve the political crisis of the democracy – the paradox of liberty and union, the one and the many – on the level of the body, sex, and homosexual love. The new role that Whitman conceived for himself as the evangel-poet of democracy and love receives its fullest articulation in the 1860 "Calamus" poems in which he represents himself and his poems as the embodiment of "a new friendship" that will "twist and intertwist" the "States" in bonds of comradeship and love: "The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers, / The continuance of Equality shall be comrades. / These shall tie and band stronger than hoops of iron" (Whitman, 1959: 351).

The Civil War

With the election of Lincoln to the presidency in 1860, the focus of national politics shifted away from the controversy over slavery to the battle to preserve the federal Union. On February 7, 1861, the Confederate States of America was formed, and by the end of the month, seven states of the lower South had left the Union. When the Palmetto Guard of South Carolina fired on Fort Sumter on the morning of April 12, 1861, no one imagined that the Civil War would last for another four years or that the war that had begun bloodlessly would be one of the bloodiest in history.

"They say . . . great deeds were done no more / . . . But battle can heroes and bards restore," Melville wrote in his elegy "On Sherman's Men" (Melville, 1866: 174). For Melville as for Whitman, the Civil War, which began as a struggle to save the Union rather than to end slavery, became a simultaneously tragic and exhilarating source of personal and political renewal. Whereas for Whitman the war became a means of testing the American experiment in democracy by realizing the capacity of the American people for self-sacrificial virtue, citizenship, and community, for Melville the war appears to have inspired new forms of public political commitment in imitation of both his real and his figurative Revolutionary fathers.

In December 1862 Whitman went to the army camp at Falmouth, Virginia, in search of his brother George, who had been wounded in the battle of Fredericksburg. "One of the first things that met my eyes in camp, was a heap of feet, arms, legs &c. under a tree in front a hospital," he wrote (Corr. 1: 59). The sight continued to haunt him as a sign of both the massive carnage of the Civil War and the dismembered body of the American republic. At the camp at Falmouth, Whitman discovered the role he

would play during the war: he would minister literally to the wounded body of the republic by visiting some 100,000 wounded, sick, and dying soldiers in the hospital wards of Washington, DC. It was ironically during the war years and especially in the hospitals, that America in Whitman's eyes came closest to realizing the republican dreams of the founders: "the War, to me, *proved* Humanity, and proved America and the Modern," he wrote (Whitman, 1875–6: 59).

Although Melville's knowledge of the war came mainly through newspapers, the telegraph, and *The Rebellion Record* (1862–5), in 1864 he too experienced the war firsthand when he went to visit his cousin Colonel Henry Gansevoort on the battlefront in Virginia. Here Melville participated in a two-day cavalry scout against the Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby and his Partisan Raiders, which became the base of his wartime ballad "The Scout toward Aldie." Melville's pursuit of the malevolent and elusive Mosby appears to have shaped his later poetic evocation of the war not only as an heroic battle to save the Union and liberate the republic from the incubus of slavery, but also as an epic and fateful struggle against the destructive force of evil in the cosmos.

At the close of the war, Whitman published *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel to Drum-Taps* (1865) and Melville published *Battle-Pieces and Other Aspects of the War* (1866). In these two retrospective poetic accounts of the war, both writers seek to locate the apparent unreason, carnage, and tragedy of the fratricidal war between North and South within some larger pattern of history. Unlike Melville, however, who draws on the Bible and *Paradise Lost* in the complex allusive structure of *Battle-Pieces*, Whitman rejects the epic models of the past for his *Drum-Taps* poems. Whereas Melville assumes a posture of ironic detachment, organizing his poems around public events, major battles, and the triumphs and defeats of northern (and some southern) generals, Whitman's point of view is democratic and engaged. He enters his poems personally in the figure of the common soldier, presenting the war in lyric rather than epic terms: his war scenes could be anywhere, North or South; his heroes are the masses of ordinary soldiers, particularly the unknown soldiers whose graves he marks with his own poetic inscription: "*Bold, cautious, true, and my loving comrades.*" Eschewing the biblical and epic analogy of Melville's *Battle-Pieces*, Whitman finds his symbolic and mythic structure closer to the democratic ground of America: in the makeshift hospitals of camp and field; in an army corps on the march; in the death of an unknown soldier; in the recurrent image of red blood consecrating "the grass, the ground"; and in the figure of the poet as wound-dresser and comrade.

But despite underlying differences between Melville's more conventionally literary and patrician and Whitman's more insistently democratic approach to the war, at their most optimistic, both poets envisioned the war as a reaffirmation of the ideals of the founding and thus a struggle to preserve the American experiment in democracy as what Melville called "the world's fairest hope" (Melville, 1866: "Misgivings"). Amid the capitalist, materialist, and corrupting influences of the time, both poets place particular emphasis on the republican acts of "patriotic passion" displayed by young men who are willing to fight and die for an ideal – whether southern or northern, states

rights or national union – grounded in a common revolutionary history (Melville, 1866: 265).

And yet, beneath these self-sacrificial acts of republican manhood and virtue, there is also in the poems of *Drum-Taps* and *Battle-Pieces* an underlying melancholia and a desire to mourn. Like Melville's dedication of *Battle-Pieces* "to the memory of the three hundred thousand who in the war for the maintenance of the union fell devotedly under the flag of their fathers," the pathos and shadowy ambiguity of Melville's poems suggests that the war may be an absurd scene of butchery visited upon the idealistic sons by the sins – and political bad faith – of the Revolutionary founders. While Melville and Whitman both emphasize themes of compassion, brotherhood, and reconciliation between North and South, their poetry also registers anxiety that the war to save the Union may have made any future Union impossible. In "Reconciliation" Whitman, like Lincoln, attempts to bind up the wounds of the nation by encouraging a spirit of reconciliation, but the reconciliation he envisions occurs not in life but in death. As in Melville's "Magnanimity Baffled," in which the northern conqueror reaches out to a southern hand only to find it dead, so in "Reconciliation" the enemy that the poet bends down to touch with his lips is a corpse.

If for Melville the victory of the Union meant the triumph of the institutions of democracy, "the principles of democratic government," for Whitman the victory of the Union meant the triumph of the American people in the non-state forms of comradeship, compassion, and love exhibited by common soldiers on both sides during the war. Whereas in Whitman's "A March in the Ranks Hard-Prest, and the Road Unknown," the "half-smile" of a "dying lad" intimates a sustaining gesture of comradeship, love, and hope for both soldiers and citizens as they march in darkness along the unknown roads of the future; in Melville's "The Scout toward Aldie," a moment of erotic camaraderie between girlish-looking boys from both North and South during the war is cut off by the icy figure of Captain Cloud (Melville, 1866: 213) in an act of vengeance that anticipates the central drama of *Billy Budd* in evoking the Civil War as a fateful sacrifice of innocence, comradeship, and love to an increasingly empowered – and seemingly necessary – reassertion of patriarchal, military, and national authority and law.

Democratic Vistas

"The years of the war tried our devotion to the Union; the time of peace may test the sincerity of our faith in democracy," Melville wrote in his "Supplement" to *Battle-Pieces*, a prose meditation on the political urgency of "the times" in which Melville addresses "his countrymen" directly on "the work of Reconstruction" and the challenges facing democracy and national reunification in the post-Civil War period. Amid debates about the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed black civil rights and citizenship and excluded former secessionists from public office, Melville urged a political policy of "Christian charity and common sense" in allowing for the speedy reentry of

the South into full participation in the “Re-establishment” of the Union (Melville, 1866: 271, 259, 260). Like Whitman, Melville opposed the Radical Republican effort to penalize and exclude former secessionists from public office as contrary to the cause of union and “those cardinal principles” of “democracy” and “representative government.” “It is enough,” he writes, “if the South have been taught by the terrors of the civil war to feel that Secession, like Slavery, is against Destiny; that both now lie buried in one grave; that her fate is linked with ours; and that together we comprise the Nation.” “[A]nd yet,” Melville adds, “it is right to rejoice in our triumph, so far as it may justly imply an advance for our whole country and for humanity” (Melville, 1866: 269, 271, 264).

But while Melville invokes fraternal sentiment and Whitman the bonds of comradeship and love as the ground for political reunion and the means of securing the advance of democracy worldwide, as in Melville’s “A Meditation,” in which the northern speaker asks, “Can Africa pay back this blood / Spilt on Potomac’s Shore?” in the post-Civil War period remorse about the “Horror and anguish” of “the civil strife” begins to manifest itself as anger against the African race for causing the war between the “natural” kith and kin of the white Republic (Melville, 1866: 242, 241). “Emancipation has ridded the country of the reproach, but not wholly of the calamity” of black slavery, Melville wrote, citing Lincoln in support of the “grave evil” represented by the “co-existence of the two races in the South” (Melville, 1866: 269). As in Whitman’s post-Civil War poem “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors” in which a “fateful” and “hardly human” black woman stands by the roadside observing General Sherman’s “liberating” march through the South, Melville represents “the negro,” whether “bond or free,” as an “alien” African presence who threatens the stability of the American republic and the future of democracy with the specter of race war (Whitman, *LGC*, 391; Melville, 1866: 272).

The Civil War, which was fought on one side to preserve the union of the republic and on the other to preserve the republican tradition of local and state sovereignty, was a springboard away from the republican and essentially agrarian order of the past toward the centralized, industrialized nation-state of the future. By the end of the war, republican idealism had itself taken a strong economic and material turn as the concepts of liberty, equality, individualism, and *laissez-faire* were put in the service of one of the most aggressive capitalist economies in history. In Whitman’s view, the “most deadly portending” change in the post-Civil War period was the emergence, under the pressures of a wartime economy, of a leviathan state. In “Conflict of Convictions,” Melville also foresaw the irony that in using national power to quell a local rebellion, the ultimate victim of the Civil War might be the “Founders’ dream.” Out of the Union victory would emerge a new power state, symbolized by the iron dome that replaced the original wooden dome of the Capitol during the Civil War:

Power unanointed may come –
 Dominion (unsought by the free)
 And the Iron Dome,

Stronger for stress and strain,
 Fling her huge shadow athwart the main;
 But the Founders' dream shall flee.

(Melville, 1866: 17)

As in "The House-top" in which the 1863 draft riots in New York evoke a Calvinistic response to the rioters as "rats – ship rats / And rats of the wharves" that must be brought under control – like the Confederate states – by the "black artillery" of military rule, Melville gives voice to but is unable to resolve the underlying paradox of liberty and law at the center of republican history: how to reconcile the potential excesses of democracy with the need for social order. "[R]edeemed" by military law, the "Town" does not heed "The grimy slur on the Republic's faith implied, / Which holds that Man is naturally good, / And – more – is Nature's Roman, never to be scourged" (Melville 1866: 87). Unlike Whitman who in "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" and other postwar poems continues to hail the advance of America across the continent and beyond as part of the advance of democracy worldwide, Melville is less sanguine about the newly empowered and imperial figure of "America" that emerges from the war: "Law on her brow and empire in her eyes. / So she, with graver air and lifted flag" (Melville, 1866: 162).

In the post-Civil War years, Whitman served as a clerk in the Attorney General's office in Washington, DC, and Melville worked as inspector in the Custom House in New York City. As government employees, both were particularly well placed to experience firsthand the corruption and excess that tested their faith – and the nation's faith – in democracy during the years of rampant greed, political scandal, and severe economic depression that marked the "Gilded Age." While Whitman published a two-volume edition of previously published poetry and prose entitled *Leaves of Grass* and *Two-Rivulets* on the occasion of the American centennial in 1876, and Melville published a centennial volume entitled *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* that interweaves a voyage through the Holy Land with dialogic reflections on the political and religious state of "era, man and nation" (Melville, 1991: 166), both writers exhibit a desire to leap away from the wounded world of time and history in their later works: Whitman moves toward an idealized vision of *democratic nationality* and spiritual union with God as "the Elder Brother" and "Comrade perfect" in the sky (Whitman, *PW* 2: 463; Whitman, 1965: 420, 419) and Melville toward a nostalgic and backward-looking evocation of an idyllic world of comradeship and affection he associated not only with Hawthorne but, in the poems of *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888), with several robust shipmates during his days as a sailor at sea.

And yet despite the desire of both writers to retreat from what Whitman called the "Pathology" of a country "coil'd in evil times" (Whitman, 1980: 669) in Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* (1871) and Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor: An Inside Narrative*, each wrote an enduring meditation on the Revolutionary origins of the American republic and the problems, contradictions, and future of democracy not only for "our whole

country” as Melville had said but “for humanity” (Whitman, 1980: 669). Written in response to Thomas Carlyle’s critique of democracy and universal enfranchisement in “Shooting Niagara: And After?” *Democratic Vistas* begins by acknowledging the seedy, greedy corruptions of Gilded Age America:

The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater . . . The official services of America, national, state, and municipal . . . are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration . . . The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism . . . In business (this all-devouring modern word, business,) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician’s serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician’s serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field.

(*Prose Works*, vol. 2: 370)

The question Whitman finally poses in *Democratic Vistas* is whether democracy is possible under the conditions of laissez-faire capitalism.

Although Whitman believed that “the ulterior object of political and all other government” was “to develop, to open to cultivation, to encourage the possibilities” of “independence, and the pride and self-respect latent in all characters,” he also feared that unleashed individualism – or what he called “Selfism” – would replace the common concern for political community – for the *res publica* – in the hearts and minds of the American people. “Must not the virtue of modern Individualism,” he asked, “continually enlarging, usurping all, seriously affect, perhaps keep down entirely, in America, the like ancient virtue of Patriotism, the fervid and absorbing love of general country?” (*Prose Works*, vol. 2: 379, 373).

To this “serious problem and paradox in the United States” (*Prose Works*, vol. 2: 373), Whitman responded with the visionary and utopian force of erotic, or adhesive, love. Countering the revolutionary movement away from the feudal structures of the past toward the sovereign power of the individual, he envisions a universal Hegelian force that binds and fuses humanity: There is “[n]ot that half only, individualism, which isolates. There is another half, which is adhesiveness or love, that fuses, ties and aggregates, making the races comrades and fraternizing all” (*Prose Works*, vol. 2: 381). It is to these “threads of manly friendship” running through the “worldly interests of America” that Whitman looks for the “counterbalance” and “spiritualization” of “our materialistic and vulgar American democracy” (*Prose Works*, vol. 2: 414). “I say democracy infers such loving comradeship, as its most inevitable twin or counterpart, without which it will be incomplete, in vain, and incapable of perpetuating itself” (*Prose Works*, vol. 2: 415).

Although *Democratic Vistas* addresses the problems and contradictions of democracy in the United States in the post-Civil War period, the future – or *vistas* – it imagines is global and transnational. Whereas Melville’s *Clarel*, which was begun at the very time when the Commune of Paris had led a successful albeit short-lived revolt against the reactionary government in France, gives voice to the right of revolution at the same time that it registers terror of the bloody and anarchic consequences of proletarian or

slave revolt, Whitman's 1871 *Songs of Insurrection* declare the "latent right of revolution" as a "quenchless, indispensable fire," and his poem "O Star of France. 1870–71" celebrates the bloody insurrection of the Paris Commune as part of the ongoing "struggle and the daring, rage divine for liberty" (Whitman, 1965: 396). Like Marx and C.L.R. James in a later period, Whitman envisioned the outbreak of the American and French Revolutions and the 1848 Revolutions in Europe as part of a broader popular movement toward democracy throughout the world. Beyond a first stage of rights and a second stage of material progress and wealth, he theorizes a future public culture of democracy that will be achieved not by law, government, or the market but by the democratizing force of adhesive, or manly, love, which "alone can bind . . . all nations, all men, of however various and distant lands, into a brotherhood, a family" (*Prose Works*, vol. 2: 381).

In the post-Civil War years, Melville too looked to non-state forms of democratic affection and community as a means of countering the increasing use of military force and law to achieve social order. At the close of the war, Melville observed that the "kind of pacification, based upon principles operating equally all over the land, which lovers of their country yearn for," can never be achieved by the force of arms or by "law-making" itself, "however anxious, or energetic, or repressive." But, he added, a just and equitable peace between North and South "may yet be largely aided by *generosity of sentiment public and private*" (Melville, 1866, 266; italics mine). "Benevolence and policy – Christianity and Machiavelli – dissuade from penal severities toward the subdued," he wrote in words that suggest the ways "the terrible historic tragedy of our time" – the blood sacrifice of the Civil War and its apparent failure to restore either the union or democracy – would continue to loom over the tragedy of human passion and law that is enacted aboard the man-of-war world of *Billy Budd; An Inside Narrative*, which was written in the years before Melville's death in 1891.

Dedicated to Jack Chase, "that great heart" and one of Melville's *chums* aboard the US frigate *United States* in 1843, the "inside narrative" of *Billy Budd* turns backward toward the ship, the sea, and the Revolutionary era in an attempt – like Whitman in *Democratic Vistas* – to come to terms with the democratic paradox of revolution and social order, liberty and law through the affective force of homoerotic attraction, community, and love inspired by the Handsome Sailor. Whereas the dialectics of individual and community in *Democratic Vistas* is propelled by the figures of Carlyle and Hegel and focused primarily on the disintegrative force of capitalist greed and laissez-faire individualism, the historical dialectics between individual liberty and state-enforced military authority in *Billy Budd* is underwritten by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) and focused on the threat to the Revolutionary heritage, individual rights, and the future of democracy represented by the rise of the imperial state.

This historical dialectics is suggested at the outset when Billy Budd is impressed from the merchantman *The Rights of Man* into "the King's service" on the *Bellipotent*, a British naval ship threatened not only by the specter of "unbridled and unbounded revolt" in its own ranks, but by the "flame" of revolution in France and the "con-

quering and proselytizing armies of the French Directory” at the beginning of the Napoleonic wars (pp. 458–9). On the simplest level *Billy Budd* is an allegory of Billy’s good nature and Claggart’s natural depravity mediated by the seemingly rational but in fact ambiguous figure of patriarchal authority and law represented by Captain Vere. Set in the year 1797, against the backdrop of ongoing Revolutionary struggle between an Old World hierarchical order of subjection to God, Church, and King, and a New World ethos of individual freedom, rights, and agency proclaimed by both the American and French Revolutions, *Billy Budd* meditates on the problems of revolution, democracy, and the rise of the imperial state represented by France and Britain in the late eighteenth century and by a newly empowered United States – with “Law on her brow and empire in her eyes” – in the late nineteenth century (Melville, 1866: “America,” 162).

The man-of-war world of the *Bellipotent* is regulated by an Old World order of military law, discipline, duty, and subjection to the imperial will of the King in his pursuit of empire, war, and national glory. The sailors aboard a warship like the *Bellipotent* are not only “the least influential class of mankind,” but like Billy Budd they are also in effect slaves who have been impressed into the King’s service against their will – sometimes even “by drafts culled direct from jails.” Through a subtle allusive structure that links the fictional events of the inside narrative with actual events in American history – including the controversial execution of three sailors as mutineers aboard the USS *Somers* in 1842 – the question *Billy Budd* asks is: Will the United States follow the imperial order of the past, signified by Britain and France, Nelson and Napoleon, or will it, can it be the “budd” of an alternative democratic order?

This alternative order is adumbrated by the “Handsome Sailor,” “a common sailor” associated from the outset of the story with “natural regality,” “strength and beauty,” proficiency as a laborer, comradeship, affection, a “moral nature” to match his physical “comeliness and power,” and the “honest homage” of his shipmates (pp. 449–51). At a time when America was retreating from the egalitarian ideals of the founding and the more radical possibilities of what W.E.B. Du Bois called “Black Reconstruction” into the compromised politics of Jim Crow, lynching as social ritual, and the terrors of the Ku Klux Klan, what is perhaps most significant about the Handsome Sailor as a comment on the failure to achieve black equality and civil rights in the post-Civil War period is the fact that in his most ideal, democratic, and hopeful form, the Handsome Sailor is first fully embodied not by the welkin-eyed Anglo-Saxon Billy Budd but by “a common sailor so intensely black that he must needs have been a native African of the unadulterated blood of Ham” (p. 450). This black Handsome Sailor is a model of democratic personality and affection – of love freely given – as the base of democratic community. At “the center of a company of his shipmates,” who “were made up of such an assortment of tribes and complexions as would have well fitted them to be marched up by Anacharsis Cloots before the bar of the first French Assembly as Representatives of the Human Race” (p. 450), he is also the herald of a new global order of democracy grounded in the ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* promised by the French Revolution.

Like the black Handsome Sailor, Billy Budd also represents the possibility of an alternative democratic order: he is a figure of republican virtue, manliness, and labor not merely for survival but as form of self-realization. He embodies the traditionally “feminine” values of the heart above the head, of feeling above the law, of love and compassion against the invasiveness of the state. This state power is expressed through the “police surveillance” of Claggart as master-at-arms and enforced by the “uncompanionable” patriarch Captain Vere in the name of reason, discipline, duty, and the “martial law operating through” officers of the King who have, in Vere’s words, “ceased to be natural free agents” (pp. 489, 503). Against the regime of “brute Force” presided over by Vere and his subordinates aboard the *Bellipotent*, Billy, like Whitman’s comrades of the open road, exhibits the power of erotically charged feeling, of homoerotic affect, as a political force that binds men together in democratic community.

Billy embodies the values of affection and “charity for all” that Lincoln had invoked in his Second Inaugural Address (1865) and Melville had seconded in his Supplement to *Battle-Pieces* as a means “to bind up the nation’s wounds” and create “a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations”). It is not the power of arms, law, or punishment but Billy’s power to model and draw forth social affection and love that orders the previously disordered society of *The Rights of Man*: “Before I shipped that young fellow, my forecabin was a rat-pit of quarrels,” says the captain of the *Rights*. “But Billy came; and it was like a Catholic priest striking peace in an Irish shandy.” “[A] virtue went out of him” and “they all love him,” he says. “Anybody will do anything for Billy Budd; it’s the happy family here” (p. 453). Even Claggart, who is driven by the passions of “envy and antipathy” to accuse Billy of mutiny, is sexually aroused by him, as suggested symbolically by his desire “to ejaculate something hasty” at the sight of Billy’s “spilled soup” (pp. 477, 473). His “melancholy expression” sometimes betrays “a touch of soft yearning, as if Claggart could even have loved Billy but for the fate and ban” of his “evil nature” (p. 485). Captain Vere must also resist the promptings of his heart and love in condemning Billy to hang for striking Claggart dead when the latter falsely accuses him of mutiny. Comparing the “the clash of military duty with moral scruple – scruple vitalized by compassion” with an “upright judge” being “waylaid by some tender kinswoman of the accused,” Vere tells his illegally assembled drumhead court: “the heart here, sometimes the feminine in man, is as that piteous woman, and hard though it may be, *she must here be ruled out*” (pp. 502–3; my emphasis). Billy’s putatively capital crimes of mutiny and homicide appear to be intricately bound up with the civil crime of disrupting sexual boundaries – of bringing out the “piteous woman” in man. Even after Billy’s death, the ship chaplain is drawn by overpowering emotion to “an act strange” of sexual, political, and spiritual transgression: “Stooping over, he kissed on the fair cheek his fellow man, a felon in martial law” (p. 512).

For Billy’s shipmates, as for the chaplain, Billy’s death is an incitement to forms of democratic community, collective resistance, and love against “the martial discipline” of the imperial state. These acts of democratic remembrance are signified by the ongo-

ing circulation among sailors of the “chips” of the spar from which Billy was hung in memory of the “image” of human goodness he represents; and by the bottom-up world of sensual pleasure and companionship evoked by the “tarry hand” of one of Billy’s shipmates, who transforms Billy’s life into the ballad “Billy in the Darbies,” which circulates “among the shipboard crews for a while” before it is “rudely printed,” and closes the narrative of *Billy Budd*. It is here that Melville, like the sailor poet who transforms Billy’s comrades world into democratic art at the end of *Billy Budd*, bids “adieu” to what he called, in an early draft of “Billy in the Darbies,” “my last queer dream.”

“With mankind,” Captain Vere proclaims, “forms, measured forms, are everything,” as he seeks to reassert the “measured forms” of discipline at the first sign of possible revolt among “the multitude” following Billy’s death. “[T]oned by music and religious rites subserving the discipline and purposes of war,” Vere’s attempt to dissolve the multitude and the threat of revolution by reasserting the martial rhythms of the state is an uncanny enactment of what Walter Benjamin would later describe as the aestheticization of politics in the Fascist state. Vere’s decision to condemn Billy despite or perhaps because of the homoerotic promptings of his heart is not only an attempt to control the multitude and “the disruption of forms” associated with the French Revolution and its aftermath through a reassertion of the power of the state and law; it is also a reassertion of the power of new medical and scientific discourses of the body and eroticism that would contain sexuality and the body within the “measured forms” of male and female spheres and the patriarchal family. Against the invasive mechanisms of the state, Melville’s *Billy Budd* like Whitman’s *Democratic Vistas* suggests the potential power of democratic personality, of non-state forms of feeling and love between men, and artistic creation in bringing an alternative democratic order and ethos into being. Whatever Billy’s last charitable words – “God bless Captain Vere!” – mean, a mournfulness and nostalgia for the very forms of erotic comradeship Whitman affirms hangs over Melville’s final work, suggesting the extent to which “intense and loving comradeship, the affection of man for man” also shapes the most politically utopian moments in Melville’s work. For Melville as for Whitman, political freedom was inseparable from freedom of written expression and freedom of sexual expression, and all three would be at the constitutive center of any new democratic order of the future. Or as Melville put it in his 1849 letter to Duyckinck: “the Declaration of Independence makes a difference” (1992: 122).

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Emily Dickinson and Her Peers

Paula Bernat Bennett

Fates, including literary ones, are sometimes best seen in numbers. In 1955, Thomas H. Johnson published *The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts* to great applause. Bearing the imprimatur of Harvard University Press's elite Belknap Press, Johnson's labor, including the dating of all Dickinson's poems and gathering of all variants, was hailed as definitive in its own day. Fifty years later, however, it has become one more casualty in the debate over the authority of Dickinson's manuscripts, and the role of the editor in dealing with them, that has plagued her publication from the start (see Johnson, "Editing," xxxix–xlviii). Fueled by the appearance of R.W. Franklin's *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* in 1981, this debate has not only rendered Johnson's edition obsolete. It now risks swallowing up criticism of the poet herself. Of this issue, I will say more shortly.

Putting that aside, however, the magnitude of Johnson's achievement cannot be gainsaid. Between 1890, when the first volume of Dickinson's poetry came out, and 1955, when the Johnson edition appeared, the feuding legatees of her oeuvre, none of whom was positioned to produce an authoritative edition of the whole, printed selections from her massive output ad libitum. With only a series of fragmented and editorially unreliable texts before them, scholars chose unsurprisingly to focus less on the poet's artistry, still a largely unknown quantity, than on those biographical questions of greatest interest to readers at large: namely, the identity of her supposed Master-Lover and her reclusiveness. So bad was the situation that even an astute critic like R.P. Blackmur could deny Dickinson's claim to conscious artistry altogether. Describing her as "a private poet who wrote indefatigably as some women cook or knit," she had, he opined, not "the least inkling that poetry is a rational and objective art" (Blake and Wells, 1968: 223).

Bringing together Dickinson's entire oeuvre into a single, rigorously systematized, collection – some 1,775 works, of which forty-one had never been published in whole or part before – Johnson's variorum changed all that. Its enormous impact can be seen in the numbers, as entries on the poet in the annual *PMLA Bibliography* doubled

and redoubled over the ensuing years, reaching close to 4,000 today. Taken together, these numbers track Dickinson's rise from a poet of unsettled status to incontestably canonical woman poet, peer to Whitman and other nineteenth-century greats.¹ While literary sleuths continue to fetch up exotic explanations for her seclusion – anorexia, agoraphobia, lupus, opium addiction, bipolar disorder, and an aborted pregnancy, among them² – and biographers still debate the Master's identity, no reputable scholar today would, as Blackmur did in 1937, deny Dickinson's consummate artistry or her conscious commitment to craft.

But if scholars no longer privilege interest in her biography over that in her art, the poet's willingness to leave her work to the mercy of fate, and her successors, seems, if anything, more incomprehensible than ever. "If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her," Dickinson wrote Thomas Wentworth Higginson, her well-meaning if outmatched "Preceptor," in June, 1862 (L265, 408). She had sent him three poems, including "Safe in their alabaster chambers" (F124), for his opinion and Higginson, who recognized her genius, but had not the slightest idea what to do with her otherwise, told her to delay publishing for now. She ceded to his admonition, convinced, it seems, that fame would catch up to her in the end as, indeed, it did. If she played no small hand in making this outcome possible, sending poems to sympathetic and well-placed literati such as Higginson and Helen Hunt Jackson, hers was still one of the great literary gambles of all time. What made her take it?

In picking Higginson to test publication's waters, Dickinson had not acted carelessly. On the contrary, he was probably the only member of the literary establishment from whom she could hope to get a reasonably fair hearing. Higginson was a political progressive, strongly supportive of women's right to an education. He had also just published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Dickinson's favorite literary magazine, encouraging young contributors to submit. If he demurred at the liberties her poetry took, and they were legion, she had, as she told him in her June letter, no "Tribunal" to which to appeal (L265, 409). When he did, he set a price on publication she refused to pay. Then, she told him, "the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me . . . My Barefoot-Rank is better" (L265, 408). She never tried to publish again. Nor, although she asked Higginson to be her Preceptor, did she change the way she wrote.

In the letter, Dickinson draped her repudiation of publication in the language of feminine abashment – the thought of publishing, she declared, was as "foreign to [her] as Firmament to Fin" (L265: 408), but this explanation does not wash. As both Cheryl Walker and Joanne Dobson have shown, many nineteenth-century American women poets, especially in the antebellum period, made similar protestations. Yet they went on to publish anyway, by century's end, achieving parity with men in periodical publications, and making serious inroads into editorial and reviewer positions as well (see Okker, 1995: 6–37, and Harris, 2004: xxv–xxxvi). So why did Dickinson fold?

This question can be answered in a number of different ways, but from what Dickinson says, the most likely reason is that she saw herself as playing for higher stakes, ones that made the aesthetic compromises necessary for publication impossible for her. Even before contacting Higginson, she had in fact penned what amounted to

a manifesto on the subject: the highly disingenuous and oft misread “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”

I’m Nobody! Who are you?
 Are you – Nobody – too?
 Then there’s a pair of us!
 Don’t tell! They’d banish us – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
 How public – like a Frog –
 To tell your name – the livelong June –
 To an admiring Bog!

(F260, about late 1861)

In the context of the June letter to Higginson, “I’m Nobody!” suggests that for Dickinson, art, or, at any rate the kind of high art she practiced, was, quite simply, an all or nothing proposition, and Higginson had merely confirmed what she already knew. She could please the literary establishment (compared here to an “admiring Bog”), making the changes he recommended, or she could abjure publication (be “Nobody”) and hope for fame by writing as she saw fit, making do in the meantime, as she rather ungraciously puts it, with the approbation of her dog.

What both poem and letter suggest, that is, is that for Dickinson fame was indivisible and absolute, and it only went to those ready to sacrifice all to serve it. This (highly romantic, quasi-religious) view of art was the sub-textual message of “I’m Nobody!” and the explicit message of “Essential Oils are wrung” (F772), “Publication – is the Auction” (F788), “Lad of Athens, faithful be” (F1606), and a host of other pronouncements on art and artists she made throughout her life. In the stark binaries of “Lad of Athens,” it was a choice between “Perjury” and “Mystery,” faithlessness and faith. And as “Publication – is the Auction” makes clear, since she, unlike most professional US writers in her day, was not financially obligated to publish, she chose faith. Art, *pace* Blackmur, *was* her vocation, her only one.

Dickinson had good reason to distrust publication. Ten years before, Herman Melville, who did write for money, had waxed wroth against poetry reviewers in *Pierre*. “[E]uphonious construction of sentences . . . judicious smoothness and genteelness of . . . sentiments and fancies,” and what they called “‘Perfect Taste’” – which Melville’s narrator identifies with avoiding anything “coarse or new” – were, he claimed, what reviewers wanted (p. 245). The most famous poets of Dickinson’s day, the so-called “Schoolroom Poets” – William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, et al. – had all won renown by practicing these literary values, albeit not so mindlessly as Melville seems to imply.³ And Dickinson had been saturated in their writing from girlhood on, inescapably so, since their verse appeared ubiquitously in the magazines and newspapers she read.

Replete with slant rhymes and metrical irregularities, excess pauses, compressed, elliptical syntax, unconventional punctuation and spelling, submerged puns, and

strange figures of speech, Dickinson's own poetry cut across the grain of this genteel aesthetic as surely in its way as Walt Whitman's "barbaric yawp" did in its (p. 77). If the evidence supports that she could have published anyway – certainly, Jackson and the publisher, Thomas Niles, were eager enough to put her into print – it's highly unlikely that editors would have allowed all her eccentricities to remain intact. Nor did they.⁴ When the first volumes of her poems rolled off the presses in 1890, between editorial regularizations of her syntax, punctuation, capitalization, metrics, rhyme, lineation, and spelling, hardly a line went unchanged even though the content of her poems remained comparatively intact, with only titles added to aid the baffled.

Half a century later, Johnson, for all his touted fidelity to the original manuscripts, in some ways hardly did better. True, by returning to the manuscripts, variants and all, he gave the scholarly world a new Dickinson, one who was the very kind of self-conscious artist that R.P. Blackmur had denied she was. But in doing so, he also perforce "normalized" her writing, fitting her verse not to nineteenth-century print standards but to twentieth-century ones instead, all too often, as David Porter was the first to complain (pp. 81–2), finishing what she had left undone. So what was editorial responsibility where Dickinson's manuscripts were concerned? And was interpretation unavoidable in any print translation of her texts?

If biographical mysteries once obsessed Dickinson scholars, these are the editorial questions that obsess Dickinson scholars today. Played out over time, they have led not only to the irreparable destabilization of Dickinson's texts, but to the placing of indeterminacy at the very center of her oeuvre and of her scholarship as well. As Domhnall Mitchell observes in *Measures of Possibility*, his thoughtful analysis of the current editing debate, once the manuscripts were taken as the *final* editorial authority for Dickinson's poems, every decision regarding her texts, even the most seemingly innocuous – e.g., the spelling of "upon" as "opon," adopted by Franklin in his revised variorum (1998) – was an interpretation. And taken together, these interpretations amount to what Johnson all-too-rightly called "creating the poems" (in *Poems*, I: xvii).⁵ If the authority of Johnson's variorum lasted without serious challenge some twenty-six years, Franklin's 1998 revision was dead on arrival, killed, in effect, by the very publication of *The Manuscript Books* that preceded it.

In order to address what Dickinson was as a poet both in herself and in relation to her peers, one must, then, start here: in the impact Dickinson's decision not to publish has had on how we approach her verse and how we understand it. While Dickinson may have compromised her poetry's privacy by circulating it in letters, she was still a private poet in ways that the vast bulk of her women peers were not. Neither her writing nor her lifestyle can be taken therefore as necessarily representative of theirs. At the same time, however, her poetry is saturated with these others' writing, if not in her style – which, in truth, is unalterably different – then in her thematics. And our appreciation of her similarities to and differences from them can only enlighten us as to both. While taking this approach will do nothing to check the problems created by Dickinson's manuscript production *per se*, it will test the limits of just how far outside

her time, and how much within it, Dickinson actually was. As the relative lack of tampering with her content in the 1890s editions suggests, here the conclusions may prove surprising.

Reading Dickinson's Manuscripts

Although this may sound counter-intuitive, what Dickinson got by not publishing was absolute control over her verse in her lifetime and after her death, both text and interpretation. By this I mean not only that the sole authoritative version of any given Dickinson poem or fragment is the manuscript but that the manuscripts are also the only "context" (or venue) within which she can legitimately be read. True, there are the "fascicles" (hand-bound groupings, averaging 25 poems apiece), discovered in her drawer after her death, along with fifteen unbound "sets." Ever since Franklin published his misleadingly titled *Manuscript Books* in 1981, scholars have increasingly turned to these groupings as the appropriate – because self-chosen – contexts for reading her poems. However, there are substantial difficulties with this approach, not least, that only 814 poems are so bound. As even Franklin admits, the status of the 333 poems in "sets" – unbound groups that range in size from one to 129 poems – is much less clear. And this still leaves 626 poems pulled from hither and yon – inserts in letters, fragments, loose manuscripts, and transcriptions of lost originals. If fascicle construction is a legitimate context for reading Dickinson, it is so, then, for less than half her poems – not "the largest proportion," as Franklin claims (ix. See also "Introduction" and "Number of Poems," in *Books*, ix–xi and 1409–10).

Even if all Dickinson's poems had been so bound, however, would this have really solved the interpretative problem caused by lack of context or would it simply have pushed it up another notch, providing new opportunities for speculation on what Dickinson may or may not have intended, not just for each poem but for each grouping as a whole? As Sharon Cameron's careful analysis of fascicle structure in *Choosing Not Choosing* makes clear, what one finds in these "books" is not the longed-for stable context for text and interpretation but, rather, a multiplicity of perspectives instead – a "heteroglossia" (p. 24, and *passim*) – that readers may or may not see as unified in relation to one or more dominant ideas (p. 105).⁶ That is, what one finds is the same problem of indeterminacy writ large over a number of different poems. Although multiple print and manuscript versions of other poets' texts – Whitman's, for example – can also create massive headaches for editors in search of final intentions, with Dickinson, everything, even with the fascicles in hand, is up for grabs. Absences, as Porter writes, are constitutive in her poetry, "at every level: morpheme, word, phrase, poem, text, corpus, and the life as its matrix" (p. 5). The fascicles simply add to this list.

For the contemporary poet, Susan Howe, however, these "absences" are not a problem but something to prize, not only because they engage us so fully in reading Dickinson – which they do – but, precisely, because they make interpretation

impossible at the same time: “Deflagration [a burning away] of what was there to say. No message to decode or finally decide. The fascicles have a ‘halo of wilderness.’ . . . they checkmate inscription to become *what a reader offers them*” ([italics added], p. 136). As far as Howe is concerned, the only Dickinson we can “know” is the one we, as individual readers, “offer” her: “my Emily Dickinson,” as Howe shrewdly titled her first book on the poet. How close “my Emily Dickinson” comes to Emily Dickinson’s Emily Dickinson, only Dickinson is in a position to know. If she did.

More than any other scholar, Howe has forced the editorial issue by consciously embracing Dickinson’s manuscript production as the absolute ground of her poetic. Arguing that the innate character of Dickinson’s art is processual not finished, Howe advocates a literalist approach to editing Dickinson’s works, insisting that *any* change, right down to the spacings between letter and letter and word and word, constitutes an editorial intervention into Dickinson’s work. “In the precinct of Poetry,” Howe writes, “a word, the space around a word, each letter, every mark, silence, or sound volatilizes an inner law of form – moves on a rigorous line” (Howe, 1993: 145).

To Howe, therefore, as in a very different way to Porter, where Johnson went wrong was not in preserving *some* of the eccentricities of Dickinson’s manuscripts, but in not preserving *all* of them, her line breaks included. “He called the Introduction ‘Creating the Poems,’ then gave their creator a male muse-minister. He arranged her ‘verses’ into hymnlike stanzas with little variation in form and no variation of cadence. By choosing a sovereign system for her line endings – *bis* preappointed Plan – he established the constraints of a strained positivity” (pp. 134–5). No less than earlier editors, Johnson had tamed “‘the halo of wilderness’” that the woman poet and her wild words represented, like the God of Dickinson’s fathers, making her conform to “*bis* preappointed Plan.”

Howe’s thesis has been enormously influential, especially among feminist readers, who, one suspects, were drawn to her romanticization of the struggle between rebellious female poet and domineering male authority (see Smith and Hart, 1998: xi–xxix; Smith, 1996: 18–21; Werner, 1996: xxi, 3, 14; and Bennett, 1992: 77). The truly revolutionary aspect of Howe’s argument lies elsewhere, however, namely, in making explicit the full consequences of editing problems that had been there from the start. If Howe is right, then Dickinson, as a poet of process, not product, *must* be read in manuscript since print by its very nature cannot help but regularize the hand-written texts. What this also means, however, as Mitchell argues, is that there can never *be* a Dickinson text.⁷ Rather, every reader must, as Howe asserts, create Dickinson for herself, with each one’s guess as good as anyone else’s as to the poet’s intention when making a particular graphic mark, leaving a particular empty space, forming a letter in a certain way, breaking a line at a particular point. Under such conditions, conditions that Mitchell’s *Measures of Possibility* pushes to their limits and finds wanting, Dickinson’s manuscripts deconstruct themselves, and authoritative scholarly editions are at best momentary stays along the path to self-annihilation, rendering interpretation impossible in the process. Which is just what Porter decided in *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*, his painful tale of frustrated love.

Reading Dickinson

Ironically, what brought Porter to the point of interpretative aporia he describes in *Modern Idiom* is precisely what led Howe to embrace Dickinson's manuscripts so passionately a decade later: namely, realizing just how misleading in its "positivity" Johnson's variorum was. Not only did Johnson's edition, Porter claimed, lend a coherence and completion to Dickinson's texts that they otherwise lacked, but, far more seriously, it obscured thereby the real (fragmentary, disintegrative, random, and highly private) nature of her actual production (p. 82). To be true to the latter, Porter was forced to rethink how he read her. "My approach," he writes, "is free from formalist assumptions, particularly from the belief that words are the sole meaning-conveying elements in her art . . . In going beyond semantic analysis we locate the angle from which the anomalies of syntax, structure, and textual character become intelligible" (p. 5). To study Dickinson meant studying those "anomalies of syntax, structure, and textual character" her "absences" created, recognizing in them, not just in her words, both the substance of her text, *and* its "meaning." Hers was, that is, as close as one could come to purely private verse, a totally self-contained language, language speaking to itself without reference to the external world.

To understand how a literary scholar of Porter's brilliance could reach such an impasse, one need only rehearse the critical history of one of Dickinson's most studied poems, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (F340). First published in 1896, "I felt a Funeral," dated circa summer of 1862, provides a graphic description of a funeral which, according to the title line, occurred in the speaker's brain. Despite the absurdity of this proposition – a stunning example of Dickinson's gift for grand gestures – "Funeral" has never stinted for admirers, the present writer included. The poem's rhythm is as powerful as Dickinson gets, a pounding march of leaden feet; and the imagery, from its controlling figure (the funeral), to the selection of the smallest supporting detail, is so vivid and precise, it makes even a lunatic idea seem real, indeed, portentous, rather as Melville does Ahab's quest for the white whale. The poem is, in fact, a masterpiece of its kind; and, I suspect, would remain a masterpiece even if someone could prove that all it was really about was a very bad headache. Here is the manuscript version insofar as print can reproduce it:

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
 And Mourners to and fro
 Kept treading – treading – till
 it seemed
 That Sense was breaking through –

And when they all were seated,
 A Service, like a Drum –
 Kept beating – beating – till
 I thought
 My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them
lift a Box
And creak across my ~~Brain~~
Soul
With those same Boots of
 Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were
 a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some
strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in
 Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and
down –
And hit a World, at every
*plunge,
And *Finished knowing – then –
Crash – *Got through –

(F340 with modifications based on ms)

The sheer number of questions this poem raises is breathtaking. Not only does Dickinson set the poem up as a single, clause-filled, dash-joined, non-sentence but we are not even told who the speaker is. S/he could be an observer or the corpse itself. If s/he is an observer, who? If the corpse, how could it “feel” its own burial? Are we supposed to take this funeral (occurring in the mind, after all) as real or as a trope for something else? What? Who is the “them”? Are they family members, strangers, friends? Where is the speaker? What “wrecked” him/her? To what does the “Plank in Reason” refer? Why does it break and what does its breaking signify? Where is the speaker “plunging”? What sort of “World/s” does s/he pass on the way down? Are they (and her plunge) internal or external? Have the worlds always been there or are they the consequence of some (unidentified) event that is the poem’s occasion? What does the speaker mean by “Finished knowing then”? Is this a reference to death? To insanity? To an inability to make sense of things? Is the speaker describing some sort of epistemological crisis or a spiritual one, tantamount to loss of faith? Why does the poem not end (i.e., have a period to mark its conclusion), especially if the speaker’s consciousness (“knowing”) does (i.e., is “finished”)?

Over the years, Dickinson scholars have answered these questions in a variety of ways, each using his or her own interpretative framework (biographical, new critical, psychoanalytic, religious, feminist, etc.) to support their reading. Feminist interpreters, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (626–7), Barbara Antonina Clarke Mossberg (30),

and Vivian Pollak (1984: 212–14), have linked the poem to Dickinson's struggle with the gender issues of her day, a struggle they believe led her to the brink of madness if not over it. Other scholars, myself included, have pointed to other kinds of cultural or biographical contexts for the poem's portrait of "psychic suffering" (Porter, 1981: 228). Some have argued that madness here is a metaphor for death; others, vice versa. Some view both death and madness as ways of talking about consciousness or about loss of faith, or even, as Karen Ford does, language's failure (pp. 69–70). Some take the funeral as "real," even if imagined, others, as a stand-in for something else, experiences, for instance, that numb one out or bring one to the brink of suicidal despair. The breaking of a "plank in reason" has been taken as a figure for insanity by John Cody (p. 29, and *passim*) and for failed faith (there is, as Cynthia Griffin Wolff astutely points out, a graphic "plank of faith" in the religious iconography of the period [pp. 227–32]). More mundanely, Judith Farr believes the poem describes "a fainting spell," with the speaker moving "from feeling to not knowing" (pp. 90–1), and so on.

Which reader seems right depends entirely on how much one shares the particular scholar's interpretative framework and their assumptions about Dickinson's life and preoccupations, for typically they all are scrupulously text-based and persuasive, only becoming troublesome when set against each other. Then, what I would call the vehicle-tenor problem in Dickinson – our inability to know when she is speaking figuratively or to what her figures refer – makes itself felt and the house of cards built on one or another set of assumptions collapses. Unsurprisingly, Porter alone stared the gorgon in the face. Comparing the poem's "dixit" with that of God, he boldly grouped "Funeral" with those poems he believed permanently out of hermeneutic reach: "This is pure deixis, a reality that can be projected only in the world of language . . . It is hermetic language and the poems themselves become hermetic enclosures" (pp. 120 and 121). That is, not only does the poem create its own reality but, doing so, makes itself a hermeneutic dead-end. Score one for Howe.

But is "Funeral" as solipsistic as Porter contends and Howe would like? Possibly, but possibly not. Inspired by the shift in critical theory that has favored studying nineteenth-century poets in historical context, recent trends in Dickinson scholarship have begun to explore the territory beyond subjectivism (hers and ours). Two books, in particular, both published in 1984, pointed the way and are relevant here. One is Barton Levi St. Armand's beautifully documented *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society*, the other, Shira Wolosky's far more intuitive *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War*, to date the only full-length study of Dickinson's relation to the Civil War. Noting that Dickinson's creativity peaked during the war years, both these authors chose to challenge one of the fundamental tenets of earlier Dickinson criticism – that she was not interested in history – and went to her writing looking for signs of the war's impact on her instead. They found them in her persistent concern with the metaphysical and moral questions war raises, in her use of war imagery, and in her references to the war in letters to family and friends, all evidence most Dickinson scholars today accept.

Wolosky does not discuss “I felt a Funeral,” a fact, as we shall see, of some relevance itself; but St. Armand does, linking the funeral rites in the poem to those observed for Frazar Stearns, the son of the President of Amherst College and a friend of Austin Dickinson, the poet’s brother. Stearns’s death in March of 1862 traumatized much of the Amherst circle to which the Dickinsons belonged (pp. 104–15) and the poet describes the reaction to it vividly, if somewhat ghoulishly, in a letter to her cousins, Fanny and Loo Norcross:

‘tis least that I can do, to tell you of brave Frazar – “killed at Newbern,” darlings. His big heart shot away by a “minie ball.”

I had read of those – I didn’t think that Frazar would carry one to Eden with him. Just as he fell, in his soldier’s cap, with his sword at his side, Frazar rode through Amherst. Classmates to the right of him, and classmates to the left of him, to guard his narrow face! He fell by the side of Professor Clark, his superior officer – lived ten minutes in a soldier’s arms, asked twice for water – murmured just, “My God!” and passed!

(L255: 397–8)

On the surface, at any rate, Dickinson seems to join her community in shocked grief at Stearns’s death, making the letter something of an elegiac memorial.

However, there’s an edge to Dickinson’s letter that undermines its elegiac intentions if such they were. There are, for one, too many puns, too much archness, and most of all, too much emphasis on the pathos of a child-like Frazar, hit by a “minie ball,”⁸ dying at his professor’s feet. Frazar, his bereaved father declared, in a gesture of patent self-comfort, “fell doing his duty as a Christian soldier” (as quoted by St. Armand, 112). Such a sentiment might have eased a father’s heart, but it’s doubtful that it would have eased Dickinson’s, who openly flouted duty-doing throughout her life, refusing even to participate in the war effort (L235: 377). And then there is the nod to Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade” (“Classmates to the right of him, and classmates to the left of him”). Dickinson seems to be paying tribute to Tennyson’s poem, but is she? Or is she parodying it, indirectly suggesting thereby that “big-hearted” Frazar, like the light brigade’s doomed members, blindly followed his superior’s orders (and inspiration), straight into the grave, falling, appropriately enough, at the man’s feet. If the latter, then Dickinson may be distancing herself from Frazer, not sympathetically identifying with him, accounting, perhaps, for the letter’s odd tone.

But if Emily Dickinson responded equivocally to Stearns’s death, her brother, Austin, did not. “Austin is chilled,” Dickinson wrote to Bowles. “[H]is Brain keeps saying over ‘Frazar is killed’ – ‘Frazar is killed,’ just as Father told it – to him. Two or three words of lead – that dropped so deep, they keep weighing –” (L256: 400). Are these, as Elizabeth Phillips hypothesizes in *Personae and Performance* (1988), the key to “Funeral” – not Frazer’s death so much as these “two or three words of lead” that reverberate so powerfully through the Bowles letter and the poem both? Do they explain, perhaps, the poem’s surrealistic effects and dislocations, its terrible pain? voicing less Dickinson’s own grief than what she believed to be Austin’s state of mind, as the bell tolled and his classmate’s funeral cortege paraded darkly through their town?

Dickinson's speaker shows no interest in the unnamed corpse, nor even in the funeral, *per se*. Rather, it is the funeral's emotional impact that engages her – the surrealistic vision of emptiness and irrational waste to which it gives rise. If for non-combatants, war was, as Dickinson says in a letter to Higginson, an "oblique place" (L280: 423), did her brother's horror at Stearns's death bring its nightmare reality home, swallowing up everything else and dropping him and maybe her into the terrifying silence of that unknowable unknown – death?

This interpretation, which at least in part paraphrases Phillips's (pp. 46–52),⁹ has, I think, much to recommend it. Indeed, Phillips argues persuasively that "I felt a Funeral" is but one of a group of poems, including "It dont sound so terrible—quite—as it did" (F384), responding to Stearns's death (pp. 50–4). And this argument becomes even more compelling when one notes that the other poems in "Funeral"'s fascicle, Fascicle 16, also seem, as Cameron argues, to be about death, along, she adds, with vision and choice (p. 138). If Cameron fails to connect these themes to the war, poems such as "How noteless Men, and Pleiads, stand" (F342) and "'Twas just this time last year, I died" (F344) still gain considerable poignancy and no small amount of sense read in this context. In fact, once one connects these poems to the Civil War, it becomes difficult *not* to see the entire fascicle this way. Certainly, the kinds of questions the poems seem to raise – how it feels to die, how others do or not remember you, how ambivalent about death one is, despite the promise of heaven's reward, etc. – are all questions Dickinson and her contemporaries had reason to ponder in and around 1862. But do I really believe it? Maybe. Probably. But then I note that Fascicle 19, containing "It don't sound so terrible," also contains "I cannot dance upon my Toes" (F381) and "I like to see it lap the Miles" (F383), and where is the Civil War connection there? And I worry that I'm once more projecting my desires on the scrim of Dickinson's verse, letting myself be seduced yet again by my own theories, even as Robert McClure Smith says in *The Seductions of Emily Dickinson*, when taking me – among other Dickinsonians – to task (pp. 190–2, 194).

Yes, there is much in "I felt a Funeral" suggesting a military funeral (those "boots of lead," the drums). Yes, the dates are right. Yes, there are the letters to Fanny and Loo and, above all, to Bowles. And yes, there appear to be other elegies to Stearns as well. Finally, however, there is nothing to say that Dickinson is not using all this, including Stearns himself, to talk about something else altogether, perhaps those very things others once suggested, myself included: madness, death, love, silence, God, revelation, aporia, fear, loss in general or loss in particular, or, even as I said first, maybe just a very bad headache. Cameron thinks "Funeral" is about ambivalence in making a thought unconscious (141–4) and who is to say she is wrong? Although her argument seems more strained than most, it fits well enough with what she says of Fascicle 16 as a whole.

And that is the point: with or without the fascicle arrangements to help us, we can't *know*. Dickinson's language is so consistently figurative, yet her figures so densely literal, it's impossible to penetrate to "I felt a Funeral"'s core so that even if the poem is about an external event, it remains inviolably private – so private even Wolosky (never

mind, Cameron) missed the possibility of a Civil War connection. As with the text itself, the poem's referent is obscured by "absences" that place it permanently outside stable hermeneutic reach. There are no titles to Dickinson poems, nor could there be without limiting her poems' meanings in ways she apparently felt no need or desire to do. So what to do?

Personally, I am prepared, with Phillips, to read "I felt a Funeral" as a Civil War poem, and more than that, as a poem in which Dickinson used her brother Austin's sorrow as a vehicle through which to explore the affects (as it were) of death and loss in that "oblique place" war was for her. Personally, despite my reservations about the fascicles' value as interpretative frameworks, I think a legitimate case can be made for Fascicle 16 as dealing, whether or not deliberately, with the war's terrible losses and the moral, theological, and personal questions these losses raised. Many of the poems she wrote in the war years do, including some in Fascicle 19. But I also think that one can only say this after one has shown that all of these poems, and the fascicles themselves, could be, and in that sense, *are* about a great many other things as well: Farr's "fainting spell" and Cameron's "death, vision and choice" among them. They are not indeterminate, but indeterminacy plays a huge role in how they are set up and thus in what they offer readers who, typically, have no access to their original occasion – what Jay Leyda so memorably called their "omitted center" (I: xxi).

Although we probably can never establish for most Dickinson poems the precise kind of "omitted center" that seems to have led to "I felt a Funeral," I believe this is true of Dickinson's poems generally. That is, they are determinate and indeterminate at once. Writing in an age when poets considered it their social duty not only to write about something but to disseminate their messages far and wide, Dickinson found a way to meld her period's poetic values with her own in one of the most extraordinary balancing acts in literary history. This is why Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson could split her content from her style, and attach titles to her poems in their editions of her verse. In ways we have lost, they knew or thought they knew what her poems were "about," however mystifying the way she wrote them, because they read her as a nineteenth-century American poet, her eccentricities notwithstanding. Although I doubt many Dickinsonians would agree, I still find their titles quite helpful on occasion. But at the same time, one must keep the host of other thematic possibilities that attend each poem in mind also since it is in them, not just her style, that the essence of her uniqueness – and her greatness – lies, a greatness marking her distance both from the poets in her own day and from lyric poets throughout time.

Reading Dickinson/Reading Others

I have devoted so much space to "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," because it points to where Dickinson and other nineteenth-century American women poets could have met but do not because of the absences in Dickinson's verse, absences that impact, as Porter says, every aspect of her writing, making it quintessentially private. What

I now want to look at is how our knowledge of these other poets' works affects, if it does, our reading of Dickinson – a subject that, until recently, most Dickinson scholars gave cursory attention to at best.

As already observed, Dickinson lived in an age when poetry's primary function, aesthetically, as in every respect, was social and communicative (see Sorby, 2005: xi–xlv; Wolosky, 2004: 147–54), but she herself did not write this way. Virginia Jackson has grounds, therefore, when she insists that Dickinson's poetry, through its appearance of unmediated personal expression instead, significantly contributed to the post-1900 re-conceptualization of poetry, a process Jackson calls, after Paul de Man, "lyric reading," reading, that is, that divorces poetry from its generic/historical and social base (2005: 9–10). "The notion of poetry as a self-enclosed aesthetic realm," Shira Wolosky remarks of this same shift, "constituted as a formal object . . . conceived as meta-historically transcendent; and deploying a distinct and poetically 'pure' language: these notions seem only to begin to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century" (2004: 147). And it was these notions, so well suited to Dickinson's private approach to writing, that ultimately led to her situation on a plane of pure poetic transcendence, where, by Wolosky's estimation, Jackson's, and my own, she does not – or not entirely – belong.

A comparison of the original presentation of Dickinson's poetry to the editorial organization of her contemporaries' verse will clarify what I mean. Edited by Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, *Poems* (1890), like the two volumes that followed it in 1891 and 1896, is divided into four broad thematic categories: poems on "Life," "Love," "Nature," and "Time and Eternity." Although scholars no longer divide poetry in this way – effectively, into thematic sub-genres – such divisions were common editorial practice in Dickinson's day. And Higginson and Todd's application of them to her verse, like their titling of the poems themselves, suggests that the two editors did see her as in some sense writing conventional poems by nineteenth-century standards. At the same time, however, by limiting Dickinson's poetry to these four categories – all sub-divisions, as it were, of the romantic or personal lyric – the two editors were also tacitly acknowledging her difference, most importantly here, her failure to diversify in any significant way the kinds of genres in which she wrote.

To get some idea of how very different her practice was from that of her peers, one need only turn to the table of contents assembled for the collected works of major male poets such as James Russell Lowell and John Greenleaf Whittier, where the sheer variety of poems, let alone their numbers, might easily overwhelm modern readers. Whittier's *Complete Poetical Works*, for example, is made up of 42 divisions and sub-divisions of which 15 explicitly address the generic intentionality of his verse: "In War Time," "Songs on Labor," "Voices of Freedom," "Ballads," "Home Ballads," "Poems and Lyrics," "National Lyrics," "Poems for Public Occasions," and so on. But even within the smaller compass of women's oeuvres, one finds a multiplicity of categories. Thus, when editing the Cary sisters' collected works (1876), Mary Clemmer turns their poetry into a veritable thematic, generic stew: "Ballad and Narrative Poems," "Poems of Thought and Feeling," "Poems of Nature and Home," "Poems of Love and

Friendship,” “Poems of Grief and Consolation,” “Religious Poems and Hymns,” “Personal Poems,” and “Poems for Children.” Other categories one finds in women’s poetry point to similar genre-based diversity, including “War Memories,” “Verses for Occasions,” and “Childhood Songs,” in the household edition of Lucy Larcom’s poetry (1884), and “Vers-de-Société and Random Rhymes” and “Verses of the Hearth” in *Poems and Verses* by Mary Mapes Dodge (1904).

Possibly because these divisions served so obviously as marketing devices, twentieth-century critics such as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren dismiss them contemptuously as “‘arbitrary and irrational,’” in their highly influential *Understanding Poetry* (1930). All but entirely erasing generic and thematic boundaries, as Jackson says, they collapse the nineteenth century’s multiple poetic genres into a single and timeless category – the lyric – instead.¹⁰ Poetry, they assert, articulating the mantra of New Criticism, should be treated “‘as a thing in itself worthy of study’” (as quoted by Jackson, 2005: 10); and so it was for most of the twentieth century, at least where the academy was concerned.

But as the nineteenth century’s multiplicity of generic divisions makes clear, this is *not* how earlier American writers, editors, and readers thought about verse. Most importantly, to them it was not one thing (“the lyric”) anymore than it was about one thing (“the personal”). Rather, they broke it down in a number of different ways on a variety of different grounds, all of which provided readily accessible frameworks for reading and interpretation. If you want hymns, go here, vers-de-société, there! “War memories,” in another place altogether, readers’ needs taking precedence over art’s in ways that twentieth-century notions of the lyric as a self-enclosed aesthetic object, apart from time and place, preclude.

Alien as this may seem to us, for authors such as William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and John Greenleaf Whittier, not to mention a host of women writers, writing poetry was easily as much a form of public service as it was an art form (see Loeffelholz, 2008: 32–127; Sorby, 2005: xi–xlv and passim; Wolosky, 2004: 147–99; and Kelly, 2008: 19–56). To perform this service, these poets wrote in an astonishingly broad range of poetic genres, including, but not limited to, hymns and psalms, parodies and satires, odes and elegies, work songs and protest poems, screeds and memorials, ballads and narratives, nature poems and love poems, and patriot anthems. Lydia Sigourney, master manipulator of conventions, as well as one of the most prolific and beloved poets of her day, put her hand, as far as I have been able to discover, to all of the above, save work songs and love poems, and she wrote an epic, *Traits of the Aborigines*, to boot. She could be this versatile because, like her peers, she treated art as both social and generic at once, making the most she could of what was valued in her day (see Bennett, 2007: 273; Kelly, 2008: 45–52).

Read with respect to this poetic, Dickinson’s difference from her peers appears to rest, then, not just in her stylistic and thematic complexity but, equally important, in her abandonment of her period’s commitment to generic variety and, with it, the relationship of service that bound nineteenth-century readers and authors together.

In using slant rhyme and multiple pauses, Dickinson went against the tide of nineteenth-century verse, which, in its quest for the genteel, valued regularity and smoothness, as Melville complained, above all. But in choosing to write overwhelmingly in common meter, and in writing (or seeming to write) only the personal lyric, she was, for all her complexity, as limited in her way as her genteel peers were in theirs. The end result, as I mentioned earlier, was a balancing act – not a root-and-branch rebellion – by a poet who wrote a kind of verse that was part of her time, but who in other respects refused to write the way her contemporaries did.

That Dickinson's choice in this respect, right down to the withholding of titles for her poems, was deliberate seems inarguable. As we saw in the discussion of "I felt a Funeral," the resulting indeterminacy is one of the primary reasons for her greatness. It is also one of the primary reasons why, together with Whitman and Poe, she was able to transition into the twentieth century when so many hundreds of other poets were erased. At the same time, however, from a nineteenth-century perspective, this approach decisively limited the real-world (or social) functionality of her verse – and Dickinson's difference in this respect cannot be stressed enough.

As the Higginson–Todd categorization of Dickinson's poetry suggests, like her peers, Dickinson could and usually did write on generic themes – "God," "nature," "love," etc. But unlike her peers, Dickinson's interest in engaging her verse with the broader expectations of her time stopped there – not just because she feared publication's possible effect, however. As she put it with some brutality in an oft-quoted letter to Louise Norcross, she had no interest in any case (as did Whittier? as did the Cary sisters?), in using her poetry to "extricat[e] humanity from some hopeless ditch" (L380: 500). The idea of serving a mass of unknown others, be it in her verse or in her life – something most nineteenth-century writers, at least in the Northeast,¹¹ saw it as their social obligation to do – seems, quite simply, to have been abhorrent to her, and was so from the start (see L30: 81–5 and L39: 102–5).

Impressive as Dickinson's single-minded pursuit of artistic excellence is, it cannot be divorced, therefore, from her simultaneous distancing herself from the socio-political world in which she lived. Emphatically unlike her peers, she did not write to improve her audience anymore than she bent her verse to meet its stylistic expectations. Indeed, despite her inclusion of poems in letters, it is unclear just how much she wrote for anyone beside herself. Although scholars such as Faith Barrett, Paul Crumbley, and Tyler Hoffman may have used the new research on Dickinson and the Civil War to broaden the outreach of her political thinking, which they certainly have,¹² she was no Harriet Beecher Stowe – nor Walt Whitman. The closest she came to this side of nineteenth-century poetics is "Color – Caste – Denomination" (F836). But even here and perhaps most tellingly, the argument for social equality is conspicuously abstract. "Death" rectifies society's imperfections – not communities acting together to bring about change nor poets urging them to do so. If, as Wolosky and others aver, Dickinson was, through her poetry, in conversation with her peers, the conversation itself took place in her room and, strictly speaking, she was the only speaker, her wars indeed "laid away in Books" (F1579).

Dickinson's lack of commitment to generic variety (or, as I see it, to public service) is, in this sense, as determinative in separating her from her peers as is the innovativeness of her writing. And both spring from the same root, her own desire (not ours) to separate herself and her verse from her own time and place – a point she makes in “This was a Poet” (F446). American nineteenth-century poetry, Wolosky writes, “directly participated in and addressed the pressing issues facing the new nation” (2004: 147), as, I might add, it also addressed the pressing issues confronting individual men and women in their daily lives (the bearing of an illegitimate child, the pain of a soldier's or a mother's loss, a suicide's despair). That Dickinson was aware of this, and occasionally wrote poems in this mold, is clear from works such as “How many times these low feet staggered” (F238), an elegy for a dead housewife, and “He scanned it—staggered” (F994), an elegy (of sorts) for a suicide.

But unlike her peers, who used similar poems to publicize their responses to the social burdens besetting both sexes in their day, Dickinson did not publish these poems – any more than she published her poetry on the Civil War, her most substantial body of time-bound verse. Rather, like all but a handful of her poems, they remained in her drawer until after her death and well after the specific occasions inspiring them were lost in time, their publicity privatized by *de facto* means. So deep was this privatization that a poem such as “The name—of it—is ‘Autumn’” (F465) could, and did, pass as a nature poem for a hundred years until the new interest in Dickinson and the Civil War led scholars to hear “Antietam,” in “Autumn,” irrevocably problematizing the poem's intentions thereafter (see Hoffman, 1994: 2–6).

While Dickinson's decision to withhold her poetry from publication may have been an aesthetic one, therefore, it also marks the limits of her poetic in strategic ways. To later readers, she could indeed seem and be what in truth she was not: a totally ahistorical poet, the quintessential (and quintessentially unique) practitioner of a “temporally self-present and unmediated” art (Jackson, 2005: 9), having at best only the vaguest connections to her time and place. Although, as we saw when discussing “Funeral,” a host of scholars have by now launched a series of persuasive challenges to this view, from a variety of different directions, given how she writes, and her failure either to title her poems or to publish them, there is no way, beyond a certain point, to make such arguments stick. Such is the basic narrative emerging from scholarly readings of “I felt a Funeral” and of her poetry as a whole. However culturally engaged we may believe her writing is, especially where the Civil War was concerned, it can and undoubtedly will continue to be read lyrically as outside time at the same time since, in the deepest possible sense, it is both.¹³

Poets and Poetesses

But what then of those other women poets, poets of whom Dickinson had to be aware since they published regularly in her favorite periodicals, but whose public example she so conspicuously failed to follow – indeed, whose very names, with one or two

exceptions, appear nowhere in her writing? How does our new recognition of their social commitment and generic diversity affect our reading of them? Does it? Should it? Or were they in fact the failed artists we so long assumed them to be?

After a century of neglect, these poets, together with their male peers,¹⁴ are now the objects of a level of scholarly scrutiny inconceivable thirty years ago. In the extensive resource section in the Modern Language Association (MLA)'s *Teaching Nineteenth-Century American Poetry* (Bennett et al., 2007), Philipp Schweighauser observes of this new scholarship that it "is profoundly reshaping how we read this verse and what parameters we set for the field as a whole" (Schweighauser, 2007: 327). Beginning with Emily Stipes Watts's 1977 *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945*, Cheryl Walker's *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900* (1982), and Joanne Dobson's *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence: The Woman Writer in Nineteenth-Century America* (1989), books devoted wholly or in part to nineteenth-century American women poets now include Eric Haralson's *Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century* (1998), Elizabeth Petrino's *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women's Verse in America 1820–1885* (1998), Paula Bernat Bennett's *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of American Women's Poetry, 1800–1900* (2003), Janet Gray's *Race and Time: American Women's Poetics from Antislavery to Racial Modernity* (2004), Eliza Richards's *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (2004), Mary Loeffelholz's *From School to Salon: Reading Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry* (2004), Shira Wolosky's book-length "Poetry and Public Discourse, 1820–1910" in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, Volume IV (2004), Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005), and Paula Bernat Bennett, Karen L. Kilcup and Philipp Schweighauser's *Teaching Nineteenth-Century American Poetry* (2007). To these one can also add special issues of two journals – the summer issue of *Victorian Poetry* (2005) and the fall issue of *ESQ* (2008) – both of which are devoted entirely to nineteenth-century American verse.

That this (mini-) explosion of scholarship in women's verse, supported as it is, by articles, biographies, and new editions of individual poets – Lydia Sigourney, Frances Harper, and Sarah Piatt, among them – is heartily welcomed goes without saying. Writers who were utterly unknown when Watts published in 1977 are now being taught at the undergraduate and graduate level. The complexity of their social and cultural roles is being explored; and far more subtle and well-informed readings of their works, both formally and from a cultural studies perspective, are increasingly available.

At the same time, however, as the earlier consensus on these writers as "Poetesses" – that is, as "overly derivative, echoic, and secondary" (Richards, 2004: 25), not to mention, hopelessly sentimental and naïve – has broken down, a significant fracturing of scholarly approaches to the field has also taken place. Of these fractures, the most important is that dividing those scholars who, from Walker and Dobson¹⁵ on, have sought to reclaim this body of poetry by reclaiming sentimentality itself, making the two, one, and those who view sentimentality as a rhetorical strategy, one of many that nineteenth-century women – and men¹⁶ – used when working in a highly diverse and

dynamic field. That is, it divides those who still view these writers as, in effect, “Poetesses,” albeit not pejoratively so, and those who see them as women poets.

While this split has profoundly affected our reading of nineteenth-century American women’s poetry as a whole, no poet’s scholarship has been more deeply impacted by it than that of Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1891–1965). Despised by earlier scholars such as Gordon Haight and Ann Douglas Wood as the very model of the model nineteenth-century Poetess, Sigourney played a foundational role in the emergence of nineteenth-century American women’s poetry. But her contemporary recuperation, which began with Annie Finch’s “The Sentimental Poetess in the World” (1988), and has recently been crowned by Gary Kelly’s selected edition of her writing (2008), is now split in two. While one set of scholars is primarily concerned, like Finch, with the aesthetic role sentimentality plays in her verse, the other, following Nina Baym, is more concerned with her poetry’s engagement with American culture at large and with her specific role as the new nation’s first professional woman poet (see Baym; Teed; Wolosky, “Poetry” in Bercovitch, 2004: 164–76; and Kelly, 2008: 19–38).

The occurrence of this split goes straight to divisions both in Sigourney’s work and in the scholarship that has evolved around nineteenth-century American women’s writing generally, beginning with the overwhelming – and all too frequently homogenizing – emphasis on sentimentality itself. Seeing how this latter approach, which makes women’s poetry and sentimentality one, works with nineteenth-century women poets and where it fails, will help clarify therefore just how useful a sentimentalist reading of Sigourney – or any other of these poets – can be, and where its interpretative limits may lie. Unsurprisingly as with the split in Dickinson between culturally-engaged and self-enclosed, both views of these women’s works – that which reads them homogeneously as sentimental Poetesses, and that which finds more than one kind of poem and poet in their writing, can be justified through readings of their texts.

Although Annie Finch was the first to recuperate “Poetess” as an honorific title, Yopie Prins and Virginia Jackson have advanced the most theoretically sophisticated argument yet produced in favor of the soubriquet’s resuscitation, and can largely be credited with its current scholarly cachet.¹⁷ In their jointly authored essay “Lyrical Studies,” published in 1999, as in their follow-up monographs, *The Victorian Sappho* (1999) by Prins, and Jackson’s *Dickinson’s Misery* (2005), the two scholars, in what seems clearly meant as a provocative gesture, define the Poetess in terms of negation, that is, by what she is not. Not “the content of her own generic representation,” they write, the Poetess “is not a speaker, not an ‘I,’ not a consciousness, not a subjectivity, not a voice, not a persona, not a self” (Jackson and Prins, 1999: 523; Jackson, 2005: 210). Generic in herself, she is one who writes “Woman’s” (generic) pain, making that pain synonymous with her verse. Poetess, poetry, and pain are one (Prins, 1999: 226), that “one” not an embodied author but a reading effect, which, because it was genre-based, was infinitely replicatable by male and female poets alike.¹⁸

For Prins and Jackson, as on varying grounds, for Walker, Finch, Dobson, and Richards, all of whom have been deeply invested in women’s sentimental verse, the absence of a clearly individuated subjectivity or self in Poetess poetry is, consequently,

not a problem of failed art. Rather, it is the key to this poetry's enormous popularity, its ability, as Jackson and Prins argue, to circulate far and wide. "Victorian British and American poetesses (the very figures accused of being most personal and subjective)," they write, slipping rather too easily from poems to poets, are best understood as vehicles of "cultural transmission" (Jackson and Prins, 1999: 529 and 522), the objects, not subjects, of their verse (p. 529, Prins, 1999: 19). Insofar as they personify an ideal ("Woman"), their role is to perform a role: to be, in Jackson's words, "[t]he subject of spectacular suffering" that forms the core of "nineteenth-century lyric sentimentalism" (Jackson, 2005: 210). Those seeking "to recuperate [Sigourney's] reputation . . . by downplaying the centrality of elegiac sentiment in her work," Eliza Richards writes, taking aim at Baym, diminish what is, in fact, "a great accomplishment" (Richards, 2004: 67). For Richards, Sigourney's sentimental fixation on the elegy, or what she calls the "echoic" repetitiveness of Sigourney verse, is the guarantor of her value, not just her status, as Poetess.

Although there are substantial problems with Prins and Jackson's hypostatization of the Poetess, their argument for the importance of Poetess poetry itself cannot be denied. On the contrary, bourgeois women *poets* on both sides of the Atlantic wrote enormously popular *poems* of just this sort – succinctly, generic poems aestheticizing woman's pain, and women themselves as figures of suffering. Indeed, as early as 1982, Walker identified "secret sorrow" as a governing aesthetic component in nineteenth-century US women's verse, a debt Jackson acknowledges (Walker, 1982: 88–93, Jackson, 2005: 209–10 and 228–33). And though Walker rarely uses the terms "Poetess" and "sentimentality," presumably because of their pejorative connotations at the time she wrote, she no less than Prins and Jackson traces the roots of these poems back to British writers like Felicia Hemans, who made of women's misery a unifying theme in their work.

Nor should we be surprised that nineteenth-century women poets were so drawn to this genre. As the Kentucky poet, Sarah Piatt, in particular, makes clear – in what is probably the most extensive body of poetry devoted to women's plight any nineteenth-century American poet produced – the bourgeois women from whose hands Poetess poetry largely came had in fact a lot to be miserable about. From the death of children to loss of love to time's betrayals, to their very lack of personhood before the law, coping with misery was, as Piatt saw it, a defining part of every woman's life, and not just bourgeois women's lives either.¹⁹ Although Piatt, like most of her American peers, wrote other kinds of poetry as well, still their work in this particular genre needs to be recognized and taken seriously, however one feels about the Poetess label itself.

Yet at the same time, Prins and Jackson's assumption as to sentimentality's dominance in nineteenth-century bourgeois women's writing – an assumption scholars have increasingly come to question since the late 1990s – also has, as I suggested earlier, some substantial limitations. In particular, as Richards's treatment of Sigourney demonstrates, using Poetess theory as one's only hermeneutic risks homogenizing nineteenth-century women's poetry all over again, thereby stripping it of its greatest strength: the diversity it represents. Where Richards is concerned, this is particularly

ironic since one could hardly ask for better evidence of this diversity even *among* “Poetesses” themselves than her own book, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe’s Circle*. Although all three of her writers – Frances Sargent Osgood, Sarah Helen Whitman, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith – confronted the same problem, being women working in a male-dominated field, what comes through in Richards’s book is less their similarity to than their difference from each other. For each of these writers handles their situation in remarkably different ways, Osgood with masks and disguises and a sharp-tongued wit, Whitman through the evolution of what Richards calls a “spiritualist poetics” (Richards, 2004: 107 and *passim*), and only Oakes Smith through conventional Poetess means, that is, the complaint or misery poem.

Like all writers, in short, while these poets used generic conventions (and what writing is not generic, even Dickinson’s, as I said?), each did so in her own way and for her own ends. To lump nineteenth-century women poets together in relation to the conventions of a single, very narrowly defined, sub-genre (*the* poem of “misery”) is to de-historicize their poetry in fundamental ways. Indeed, it is to de-historicize them. For whatever else, their poems are not all one poem, endlessly repeated by authors who, be it for personal, cultural, or generic reasons, did nothing else. Yet beyond a certain point, Poetess theory simply has no way to account for the differences between them. Sigourney, who in fact wrote much more variously than Richards’s three other poets, has to be fixated on the elegy because otherwise she cannot be a Poetess. Other poets, writing outside the parameters of the Poetess poem entirely, poets such as the noted black women writer, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and working-class poets like the Lowell Mill Girls, cannot be accommodated at all. They can only be omitted, as Walker admits omitting Harper from *Nightingale’s Burden* because she did not fit (Walker, 1982: xi). Yet all of these poets went into making nineteenth-century American women’s verse the richly textured tapestry it is, and to ignore them makes of this poetry a lesser thing.

Reading Sigourney

So if nineteenth-century American women poets were not all – or always – Poetesses, how else, in light of their diversity, can we construe them? Instead of looking to British models for answers to this question, since the literary market for women’s verse in Britain was in fact radically different from that in its former colony (Bennett, 2007: 265–71), let me return now to Sigourney. Putative author of countless poems on dead babies and dead women – and, some still claim, very little else – to what extent was Sigourney the sentimental Poetess that her soubriquet as “the American Hemans” (Haight, 1930: 78), and her predilection for elegiac poetry, in particular, seem to suggest? Was she, that is, a Poetess as both Wood and Haight and Prins and Jackson, admitting their differences – one to tear down, the other to reclaim – claim?

Despite Sigourney’s presumed bona fides as a Poetess, Prins and Jackson provide no answer to this question since they do not discuss her at all. However, in a 1990 article

“Reinventing Lydia Sigourney,” Nina Baym opened up the issue of the actual composition of Sigourney’s oeuvre in what, at least to this writer, is, by virtue of the approach it takes to Sigourney’s verse, the single most influential essay yet written not just on Sigourney, but on nineteenth-century American women’s poetry generally. Succinctly, despite the tide of criticism running in the opposite direction, Baym’s answer to this question was a resounding “no.” Sigourney was not just a sentimental Poetess nor did she confine herself to one kind of poem, be it elegy or anything else.

Baym’s argument rests in part on numbers, a critical strategy that more theoretically oriented scholars tend to scoff at, but that, as I noted in my opening paragraph, can sometimes be compelling – especially when used to test otherwise unverifiable assumptions. Baym’s discussion of the numerical make-up of Sigourney’s oeuvre is a case in point. Not only are “two-thirds of [Sigourney’s] published books . . . prose,” she observes (390), but the elegies in the four poetry volumes she studied, including *Zinzendorff*, which Wood claimed was “‘almost solidly funerary verse,’” averaged only 29 percent of the whole (as quoted in Baym, 1990: 387 n. 5).

If one remembers that Sigourney was in the business of publishing for money and, consequently, not above “padding” volumes with elegies written on demand, it becomes even harder to weigh accurately how important this genre is in relation to her output as a whole. Yes, as Richards contends, much of her poetry manages to raise death’s specter one way or another – as, I might add, most literature does. But being the nation’s mourner-in-chief was only one of many slots this agile and determined woman writer filled. “With the tools of the incipient mass culture at her disposal,” Crain writes, summing up Sigourney’s all-important relationship to a market she so ably served, “she created a text-based community of citizen-readers, with herself at its center, as bard and scribe, teacher, and mother, conscience, counselor, and consoler” (Richards, 2004: 383).

These were the other sides of Sigourney’s writing that Baym’s “reinvention” of her as historical writer, teacher, and guide was first to expose, and it would be impossible to overestimate how much their recovery has impacted our understanding not just of Sigourney herself but of nineteenth-century American women poets generally, indeed of nineteenth-century poetry as a whole. This impact can be seen in recent attempts not only to “reinvent” Emily Dickinson as a historically – and socially – engaged poet, but to understand the public roles that most nineteenth-century American poets chose to play. One need only turn to the recent scholarship of writers as different as Paula Bernat Bennett, Patricia Crain, Frances Smith Foster, Janet Gray, Eric Haralson, Wendy Dasler Johnson, Gary Kelly, Paul Lauter, Mary Loeffleholz, Tricia Lootens, Elizabeth Petrino, Melissa Teed and Shira Wolosky, not to mention the entire content of the MLA’s *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Poetry*, to realize just how productive Baym’s approach to Sigourney has been and how fruitful for our treatment of nineteenth-century verse.

Reading this scholarship, what becomes painfully evident is the degree to which earlier writers underestimated not only the importance of Sigourney’s diversity, but that of the nineteenth-century American literary market also, a market in which all

comers could find a place no matter what their racial, ethnic, gender, or class background (see Lehuu, 2000: 3–13; Gray, 1998: 347–52; and Bennett and Kilcup, 2007: 1–8). If Sigourney wrote elegiac poems of generic sentimentality, she wrote in a diverse set of other styles, genres, and subgenres as well, publishing virtually anything the US's exceedingly capacious literary market could bear. Sigourney, Kelly writes, rejected Hemans's posture as "national poetess and female bard" in favor of a "pragmatic, utilitarian, and professional approach" (Kelly, 2008: 48; see also pp. 33–52).

The result was an eclectic if very Victorian mix, running the gamut from eighteenth-century-style satires, complaints, and odes, to classical and Miltonic epic, British Romantic nature poetry, American jeremiad and social protest poetry, to evangelical sermonizing and sentimental domestic nostalgia. In exploiting the generic plurality available to her, moreover, Sigourney opened the way for all women poets into the American literary market as women writers – not just as Poetesses. Abjuring the self-effacement that lay at the heart of the Poetess poem itself, at least in its purest form, Sigourney evolved a multi-positional form of agency and voice instead, one allowing her to play preacher, teacher, historian, elegist, politician, wife, mother, and prophet, sometimes all rolled into one, sometimes parceled out among individual poems.

In a poem such as "Fallen Forests," in which Sigourney's speaker meditates on the consequences of deforestation in western New York State, she could, arguably, be said to adopt all these postures at once. As far as is known, this poem first appeared in *Scenes in My Native Land* in 1845, where it introduced an extended and passionate prose appeal against the practice of clear-cutting. At some points, the author seems to be advocating little more than judicious cutting: "[A] far-reaching mind will spare here and there, the time-honored tree, to protect the future mansion from the rays of the noon-day sun," the speaker opines, sounding very much like the bourgeois matron this gardener's daughter had in maturity become (p. 120; also see Bennett, 2007: 171–2). But in one of Sigourney's typical mixes of tonal registers, this moment of gracious domesticity is preceded and followed by tough-minded expressions of outrage instead. Indeed, Sigourney opens the appeal with a description of clear-cutting's destructiveness that is positively Thoreauvian in detail and well worth quoting in full for the insight it gives into Sigourney's own peculiar form of "heteroglossia," one that permitted her to use even masculine writing styles in service to domestic feeling and feminine concerns, and not blink:²⁰

Hills and vales are seen covered with stately and immense trunks, blackened with flame, and smitten down in every form and variety of misery. They lie like soldiers, when the battle is done, in the waters, among the ashes, wounded, beheaded, denuded of their limbs, their exhumed roots, like *chevaux de frise*, glaring on the astonished eye.

The roof of the smallest log-hut, or shanty, seems the signal of extinction to the most sacred and solemn groves; and Cromwell advanced not more surely from Naseby to the throne, than the axe-armed settler to the destruction of the kingly trees of Heaven's anointing."

(Sigourney, 1845: 119)

“Wounded, beheaded, denuded of their limbs” – this is no sentimental hint to the mostly wealthy to have a care, lest their “mansion” get too hot in summer, but a raw, infuriated description of what nineteenth-century forestry practices were doing to a land given to us by God in trust.

And it is this rage, fueled by Sigourney’s belief that trees are “of God’s planting” (p. 120), and by her historical awareness of just what was being lost, that leads her speaker to analogize the relationship between settlers and trees as warfare both in the appeal and in the poem that introduces it. Embedding the poem’s sentimental and elegiac gestures within an unequivocally jeremiadic framework, the speaker envisions what a future without trees would mean, not just for humans in their unshaded mansions, but for the entire ecosystem, concluding with a searing prophetic warning.

Man’s warfare on the trees is terrible.
 He lifts his rude hut in the wilderness,
 And lo! the loftiest trunks, that age on age
 Were nurtured to nobility, and bore
 Their summer coronets so gloriously,
 Fall with a thunder sound to rise no more.
 He toucheth flame unto them, and they lie
 A blackened wreck, their tracery and wealth
 Of sky-fed emerald, madly spent, to feed
 An arch of brilliance for a single night,
 And scaring thence the wild deer, and the fox,
 And the lithe squirrel from the nut-strewn home,
 So long enjoyed.

 He lifts his puny arm,
 And every echo of the axe doth hew
 The iron heart of centuries away.
 He entereth boldly to the solemn groves
 On whose green altar tops, since time was young,
 The wingèd birds have poured their incense stream;
 Of praise and love, within whose mighty nave
 The wearied cattle from a thousand hills
 Have found their shelter mid the heat of day;
 Perchance in their mute worship pleasing Him
 Who careth for the meanest He hath made.
 I said, he entereth to the sacred groves
 Where nature in her beauty bows to God,
 And, lo! their temple arch is desecrate.
 Sinks the sweet hymn, the ancient ritual fades,
 And uptorn roots and prostrate columns mark
 The invader’s footsteps.

 Silent years roll on,
 His babes are men. His ant-heap dwelling grows
 Too narrow – for his hand hath gotten wealth.

He builds a stately mansion, but it stands
 Unblessed by trees. – He smote them recklessly
 When their green arms were round him, as a guard
 Of tutelary deities, and feels
 Their maledictions, now the burning noon
 Maketh his spirit faint. With anxious care,
 He casteth acorns in the earth, and woos
 Sunbeam and rain; he planteth the young shoot,
 And props it from the storm; but neither he,
 Nor yet his children's children, shall behold
 What he hath swept away.

Methinks, 'twere well,
Not as a spoiler or a thief to prey
On Nature's bosom, that sweet, gentle nurse
 Who loveth us, and spreads a sheltering couch
 When our brief task is o'er. O'er that green mound
 Affection's hand may set the willow tree,
 Or train the cypress, and let none profane
 Her pious care.

Oh, Father! grant us grace
 In all life's toils, so, with a steadfast hand
 Evil and good to poise, *as not to pave*
Our way with wrecks, nor leave our blackened name
A beacon to the way-worn mariner.

(Sigourney, 1854: 83–5 [italics mine])²¹

Teasing out the intricate entwinement of rhetorics in this poem, even more evident in the 1854 version I have reproduced than they were in the poem's first manifestation in 1845, the wanton destruction of forests is presented not just as warfare and sacrilege but as perversion, a figurative preying of the child on the mother's (denuded) body. Although Sigourney is usually, and to my mind, wrongly, viewed as a poet of domestic felicity, the sub-textual message here is explicitly the male inversion of domestic values, such as those symbolized by the squirrel's "nut-strewn home," the cows' search for "shelter," and the nurturing "green arms" of the trees themselves. Clear-cutting is not home-making. It is world-destroying, not just for squirrels and cows, but for us as well. Hovering unsaid in the poem, but hinted at in the appeal, these same settlers were those who with their axes drove the forests' indigenous human inhabitants from their homes (see 122–4).²² What they leave in their wake is no earthly paradise but a land filled with blackened wrecks and wantonly stripped of its nurturing potential. A land, in short, of corpses.

Yet even if we accept such an interpretation as I have offered, given how deeply opposed Sigourney was to the practice of clear-cutting, it still seems legitimate to ask why she didn't stick to her masculinist guns (so-to-speak) and not include the sentimental at all, discursively-speaking mixing things up this way? That is, why does she seem to weaken her outrage, indeed, domesticate it, not only in the prose appeal

but here, by juxtaposing “soft” images such as “the lithe squirrel” and its “nut-strewn home,” and the “wingèd birds” pouring “their incense stream; / Of praise and love,” and so on, next to such hard-edged ones as “rude hut[s],” “puny arm[s]” “ant-heap dwelling[s]” and “axe[s]” that “hew / The iron heart of centuries away”? Why does she write nostalgically over what has been and will be lost and at the same time so blatantly politically, damning this deforestation as a wrong against the future and a wrong against God? Or finally, why does she teach and preach, elegize and romanticize all at once, as if she possessed more than one “voice” through which to speak, and more than one perspective from which to see her subject? Why, in short, such “heteroglossia” and multi-perspectivalness in a poem that seems clearly intended to bring about a political end?

And, of course, this is my point. As Cameron lamented when speaking of the multi-perspectivalness of Dickinson’s fascicles, we today, still under the influence of the New Criticism, expect a “unitary self” and aesthetic consistency from our writers, a “voice,” as it is called. Albeit in very different ways, Phillips, Cameron, and Jackson have, as we have seen, all challenged this view where Dickinson is concerned, noting that Dickinson’s persistent use of the first person singular – the romantic “I” – has masked the dis-unity of her poems, allowing her to be read lyrically, as Jackson argues, instead. No less than Dickinson, Dickinson’s peers wrote multi-perspectivally also, but because they chose to mediate difference through their handling of generic conventions rather than by manipulating the poet’s “I,” as Dickinson did, they have been put down as bad writers, none more so than Sigourney.

But no more than Dickinson (albeit in her own way) was Sigourney a twentieth-century writer. She was a Victorian, and her aesthetic was one of plentitude, matching the plentitude of the popular market for which she wrote. Writing for this market, she could exploit all the seemingly incompatible speaking positions she adopts in “Fallen Forests” and other poems. By presenting her speaker as a sentimental woman poet – a wife, mother, and teacher – and simultaneously as a jeremiadic preacher, a historian, and political visionary, rhetorically and in terms of the generic conventions available to her, she could have it all. In doing so, she did not challenge gender norms so much as expand them, taking on the mantle not just of Poetess but of public speaker, and with it, the agency of an embodied speaker, a speaker who knew her audience and reflected back to it its own diversity, including the contradictions within its own points of view.

It is of course possible for readers to dismiss Sigourney’s prophetic warnings in “Fallen Forests” as so much woman’s misery in another guise but if so, it is sentimentality with a social conscience, as so much nineteenth-century sentimentality was, and its impact on the real world was also real. As we now know, the modern environmental movement, like so many other movements from labor laws to suffrage, had its first flowering in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Poems such as “Fallen Forests” made up a small but clearly defined sub-genre (“ax poems,” I call them) within the broader genre of environmental protest literature. Even Whitman wrote such a poem, albeit from the opposing perspective (“Song of the Broad-Ax”). And if the poets

who wrote them wrote sentimentally and generically, that did not mean that they did not write out of deep personal conviction at the same time. It also does not mean that their words were ineffective, either as aesthetic or political discourse.

Sometimes witty, sometimes heavy-handed, sometimes passionate with outrage, sometimes irritatingly didactic or excessively sentimental, Sigourney's play with the poetic conventions of her period and place was her "voice," it was her "consciousness," it was her "self" in all its complexity and Victorian plenitude. As such, it set the pattern for what a significant portion of American women's poetry would become, not just in the nineteenth century but to this day, that poetry which, as Adrienne Rich put it, when abandoning her own formalist past, was born of "the will to change" (p. 42).

Sigourney – the assiduous marketer of texts of virtually every kind – was Emily Dickinson's flip side. And any national literature worthy of the name will and must have both: the poet who goes out into the world and the poet who writes the world inside herself. There is no need nor should there be any obligation to choose between them. On the contrary, as more and more focus has been directed towards the socio-political concerns raised in poetry by the likes of William Carlos Williams, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Amy Lowell, Marianne Moore, H.D., and Elizabeth Bishop, the clearer it becomes that most poets, not just Sigourney and Dickinson, are, in fact, both, even those who insist most adamantly on poetry's ahistorical, transcendent status. And it only strengthens our poetry that they are.

NOTES

- 1 This is not to say that her art went wholly unadmired. According to Pollak, Dickinson was "hyper-canonical . . . in the world of women's poetry" well before 1955 (letter, n.p.), and male critics like Allen Tate and Richard Chase were persuaded of her brilliance also. However, it was only after Johnson that the full panoply of scholarly apparatus devoted to canonical authors was rolled out, including a standard biography, concordance, annotated bibliography, and mandatory appearances in introductory textbooks, not to mention a name society and journal, recordings, and t-shirts.
- 2 See Shurr for pregnancy (1983: 170–88). The remaining surmises can be confirmed by googling "Emily Dickinson and [insert affliction]," e.g., Emily Dickinson and lupus.
- 3 Although the favored chestnuts of this poetry, especially Longfellow's, seem to fully support Melville's contentions, a new, far more complicated, view of these writers has begun to emerge in the criticism of Gartner; Haralson, 1996; Higgins; Peterson; Rocks; and Sorby.
- 4 In a paper on Dickinson, given at Dartmouth College in May 2009, Miller forcefully argued for Dickinson's publicity in 1862, rightly pointing out that the nineteenth century was far more tolerant of innovation in verse than has generally been supposed. I fully agree. However, there were limits, and editors had no compunction about "correcting" what they saw as errors; *vide* what happened to Dickinson's "Snake" (Fr 1096), when it was published in the *Springfield Republican*. Although, as Mitchell and Miller argue, changes in capitalization and lineation, and the adding of titles, might not have bothered Dickinson, I find it very unlikely that wholesale changes in her punctuation would have been acceptable to her. See Mitchell for

- an alternate perspective (2005: 32–9 and *passim*).
- 5 For samples of individual “free-lance” editing, that is, editing that goes outside Belknap Press’s imprimatur, see Shurr, *New Poems*, and Smith and Hart.
 - 6 Cameron takes the variant, i.e., Dickinson’s capacity to generate alternatives, as her model for fascicle construction. Just as Dickinson left multiple word choices as, effectively, *parts* of her poems, she argues, so the fascicle groupings offer readers multiple points of view on one or more subjects. She contrasts this with what she sees as the “unitary self” to be found in poets like Whitman and Stevens. As will become evident later in this chapter, this thesis potentially rings interesting changes on the heteroglossia found in other nineteenth-century poets’ works, where variation and complexity are introduced through the mechanism of genre instead. See note 8 below.
 - 7 I can do no better than cite Mitchell re: “the idea in some Dickinson circles that variants create new works”: G. Thomas Tanselle reports that “‘Those fair – fictitious People,’ has twenty-six variants that fit eleven places, amounting to 7,680 poems.” And, D.C. Greetham, reporting Tanselle’s observations in a separate article, asks: “Leaving aside the practical question of who would be willing to publish or read 7,680 ‘poems’, it becomes clear that the implications of [such a method of creating works from variants] are destabilizing, not only of the ‘traditional notion of a single best text’ . . . but of any text at all.” This may sound absurd, but Franklin was sufficiently persuaded of the variants’ full canonical status that, rather than provide for alternative versions in smaller type, as Johnson did, he gives whatever number of versions are necessary to accommodate them all on an equal footing, with precisely the result Greetham predicts. (See Mitchell, 2005: 273.)
 - 8 “Minie balls” were a kind of muzzle-loading rifle bullet, named after their inventor, Claude Etienne Minié. However, given Dickinson’s emphasis on the contrast between Frazar’s “big” heart and the comparatively tiny size of the ball that killed him, a submerged graphic pun on “mini” is possible here as a shortening of either miniature or minikin, both extant, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in Dickinson’s day.
 - 9 Phillips handles the Norcross letter much more positively than I do but in the end arrives at much the same place, namely that the poem “probably has its origins . . . not in the poet’s personal collapse but in her sympathetic and imaginative participation with those she loved . . .” (1988: 50). Phillips uses “Funeral” as a good example of how scholars have automatically assumed that when Dickinson uses “I” she is speaking of herself – not, as she herself said, of a “supposed person” (p. 4) – an argument that in its own way supports Cameron’s thesis, that there is no “unitary self” in Dickinson’s poetry. See note 5.
 - 10 There is a substantial contradiction in Jackson’s argument here that, as we will see, runs directly counter to her treatment of nineteenth-century poetry as itself homogeneous (see my discussion of Poetess poetry in the next section). She is indeed right that nineteenth-century poets wrote in a wide variety of genres. She is wrong when she then lumps all these genres together under the rubric of Poetess poetry, and I am still at a loss as to why she did.
 - 11 This is a point I cannot develop further here, but, until the Civil War, southern women writers largely avoided both politics and “doing good” in their writing; and, as a corollary to this, they pretty much avoided “high sentimentality” as well, favoring the British Romantic tradition instead (Byron, Coleridge, et al.). For a discussion of the various forms of sentimentality extant in the period see Bernat Bennett, 2003: 11–12 and *passim*.
 - 12 See Barrett, “Public Selves,” for an overview of scholarly work on Dickinson and the Civil War up to 2007. Barrett has a number of articles on Dickinson and the Civil War and a forthcoming book: “‘To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave’: American Poetry and the Civil War.” Crumbley has a book forthcoming on Dickinson as a political writer, “Winds of Will: Emily Dickinson and the Sovereignty of Democratic Thought.” See also Pollak,

- “Dickinson and the Poetics of Whiteness,” for an interesting take on a senior scholar’s rethinking of the war’s impact on the poet.
- 13 For a fascinating exchange between the novelist Joyce Carol Oates, on the one side, and two well-known Dickinson scholars, on the other, on how to read Dickinson, see Lease and Oberhaus and see Oates. Oates refuses to register the importance of the Civil War in Dickinson’s poetry, even if it exists, saying it simply doesn’t matter to her since Dickinson’s “genius transcends such expectations,” thereby terminating the debate.
- 14 Although this chapter is focused on Dickinson and nineteenth-century women writers, male poets who also were erased at the onset of modernism are also receiving a good deal of new attention. See Chapman, and Hendler, Calhoun, Haralson 1998, Hendler, Meyer, Loeffelholz 2008, Traister, and the research cited in note 3.
- 15 See Dobson, “Reclaiming,” in particular.
- 16 See texts cited in notes 3 and 11.
- 17 To get some idea of the variety of scholarship now dedicated to the figure of the Poetess and the degree to which its revival is being contested, especially in Britain, see Thain. Although still very much in the making, *The Poetess Archive* website is also worth a visit.
- 18 See Jackson and Richards. In this brief introductory essay to the inaugural edition of the *Poetess Archive Journal*, the authors greatly broaden their claims for US Poetess poetry, asserting with breathtaking assurance that “[I]t is not an exaggeration to say that the Poetess became a figure for the American literary marketplace itself.” Among the male poets whom they wed to this tradition are Longfellow, Whitman, Chivers, Aldrich, Hay, and Riley, implicitly extending Prins and Jackson’s theorization of the Poetess to virtually any nineteenth-century American poet who put pen to paper, including poets of “different races,” mentioned but unnamed in their conclusion. For a close and far more persuasive reading of one male writer who does seem clearly to have been influenced by Poetess poetry, or, at any rate, to have been in tune with it – Poe – see Richards (2004: 28–59).
- 19 Although the focus of US Poetess studies has to date been exclusively on white bourgeois writers, Piatt’s poetry on impoverished women in the US and in Ireland, where she lived for eleven years, when put together with her poems on historical female figures, suggests that for her, women’s misery cut across lines of class, caste, nationhood, and time. See poems such as “A Well-Known Story,” “The Prince Imperial,” “The Thought of Astyanax,” “Rachel at the Lodge,” and “A Tragedy of the Night,” in *Palace-Burner*.
- 20 For various takes on Sigourney’s mixture of discourses, see Crain, 1998: 381–4, Lauter, and Dasler Johnson’s very intriguing essay on Sigourney’s rhetorical “cross-dressing.”
- 21 I have used the 1854 version of “Fallen Forests” for the sake of the two italicized passages both of which make the poem considerably stronger than the version in *Scenes in My Native Land*. Otherwise, however, there are only minor differences between the two versions. “Fallen Forests” represents rare evidence that, contrary to popular opinion, Sigourney did revise when she had a mind to.
- 22 The description of the native tribes inhabiting the outskirts of Buffalo (population 26,000) is relatively neutral in comparison to that on clear-cutting. However, Sigourney does include (without explicit commentary) a scene on a train in which a white passenger, charmed by a particular Indian infant, seeks to buy it from its mother who was peddling her goods at the train station. Unsurprisingly, Sigourney makes a point of stressing the mother’s anguished fear that she would lose her child (123–4). That is, her concern with the ability of the dominant class to dispossess those over which it has power – be it trees or Indians – remains the same. So does the emphasis on the thoughtlessness and blindness to consequences such depredations entail. Since the passenger who makes a bid for another woman’s child is a woman herself, this chapter in *Scenes* also goes a long way towards problematizing any simplistic reading of Sigourney (and they are legion) as an ardent and uncritical advocate for womanhood and domestic values.

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Race and Literary Politics

Frances Smith Foster and Cassandra Jackson

Even before the National Human Genome Project which calculated that 99.9 percent of the 3.1 billion nucleotides are the same in all human beings, scientists had concluded that more genetic variations existed *within* the so called “races”¹ than *among* them. The biological basis of race proven invalid, in 1995, a multidisciplinary group of prominent scientists released a “Revised UNESCO Statement on Race,” explaining that race could not be considered a legitimate scientific category. Today, credible theorists recognize race as a social construct, a pervasive invention of human difference, with no significant basis in biology but with great significance in social, economic, and political practices.

The myth of race has been and continues to be a persistent factor in shaping American culture. Thomas F. Gossett is but one of those who have charted the progressive definitions and influences of race in relation to social status assigned or assumed in the United States of America.² Gossett reminds us that racialist theories have been present since antiquity, and at the founding of the American colonies the term fluctuated in definition and in importance. The earliest colonists in North America had some notions of race as difference but the varying histories, religions, and class status of the French, Spanish, English, and assorted others who came to the New World informed their beliefs and practices in multiple and often contradictory ways. Thus, as the negotiations and anxieties occasioned by the adoption of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution revealed, racial politics played a major role in the earliest formal and informal American literatures. Bruce Springsteen’s lyrics apply to the particular theories and practices of racism that affect our literary politics as well as our lives – they were indeed born in the USA. Still homegrown, US American racial politics were influenced by European ideas such as those of Johann Friedrich Blumenback, whose 1775 doctoral thesis, “On the Natural Variety of Mankind,” helped inform a monogenetic model of race. Blumenback argued that no precise data could be developed to distinguish one group of humans from another but he believed, nonetheless, that all humankind could be divided into five groups that he listed as

Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay (Gossett, 1965: 37). These classifications correspond generally with the naming of groups by colors: black, brown, red, yellow, and white. By the end of the eighteenth century, even Thomas Jefferson, whose racial theories in *Notes on the State of Virginia* came to symbolize those of late eighteenth-century American liberal intellectuals, had come to believe that each racial group had potential for intelligence and virtue and with proper guidance and discipline could make advances “towards their reestablishment on an equal footing with the other colors of the human family” (p. 53).

In the nineteenth century, the idea of polygenesis or distinctly different species of humans began to gain ground, especially when argued in publications by eminent scientists such as Samuel George Morton and Louis Agassiz. Though not without controversy, the polygenetic argument influenced US American literary politics until the mid-nineteenth century, when Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) appeared. Though Darwin’s theory ascribed a common origin to all humans and thus refuted polygenism, it did not assume that all human races were equal. Whether one accepted the monogenetic theory or the polygenetic theory, during the nineteenth century, writers and readers in the United States recognized a racial hierarchy in which whiteness operated as the apex of the social structure. Indeed, the construction of Americanness depended on the fiction of racial difference. Valerie Babb describes the rise of a notion of whiteness, informing the formulation of an American identity, this way: “To the different ethnicities and classes who left Europe to come to an unfamiliar wilderness where new structures had to be devised to meet new needs, whiteness furnished a social order that forged a nascent national identity and minimized potential class warfare” (Babb, 1998: 37).³ Because race or “whiteness” operated as a critical determinant of American citizenship, the building block of American nationhood, the notion of racial categories was central to the construction of a national identity for the newly formed United States of America. Toni Morrison rhetorically asks in *Playing in the Dark*, her critical study of the representation of race in American literature, “In what public discourse does the reference to black people not exist?” And her answer, which we embrace, is that “Africanism [black presence] is inextricable from the definition of Americanness – from its origins on through its integrated or disintegrating twentieth-century self.”⁴

The subject of race and literary politics in the United States is, then, vast and complicated. It would fill volumes. Hence, our discussion offers a truncated and focused take on how American literature has formed and been informed by configurations of race. We focus on the cross-fertilization of racial ideology and literary production in the US from 1826 to 1900. We focus on African-American literature as an example of the American literatures that construct and are constructed by the notion of race. In so doing, we intend our discussion as part of a larger conversation about race in the United States, and we do not discount ways in which the construction of white identity, as well as black, brown, red, and yellow identities – and more recently, how “mixed-race” identities – are interrelated and interconstructed in the complex that we know as “American literature.” Indeed, consideration of one way in which American

culture delineates whiteness and thereby articulates blackness, and vice versa, helps illuminate the dynamic proliferation of race construction in American literature. For example, it highlights, the deliberate and illogical legal and popular distinctions that once made people of Mexican descent “white” for census purposes and that routinely imagine Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Brazilians as “white” while identifying Haitians, Jamaicans, and other Caribbean islanders as “black” as both interconstructions of racial identities and calculated formulations of racial difference. Recent controversies such as the US government’s denial of tribal recognition of the so called “black Seminoles” also illustrate a fierce desire to cling to race as biological fact, as well as a pervasive resistance to the fluidity of ethnicity.

To begin within our chronological framework, let us consider James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) as it offers an example of the interconstructedness of race as well as how interdependence served purposes of white supremacy. This novel is concerned, primarily, with Native American removal and the resulting expansion of land for white settlers, but it is also concerned with ways in which slavery would advance removal of Native Americans by providing African-American labor to make US territorial expansion possible and profitable. By defining African-American identity and Native-American identity as essentially behaviorally opposed, Cooper participated in a move to detach the implications of Native American removal and African-American enslavement and in the process he may be read as exposing US American commercial greed and its failure of proclaimed egalitarianism. Constructing African-Americans as easily domesticated labor and Native Americans as a fierce military force incapable of domestication, Cooper not only defends racial inequity, but he asserts its particularity, suggesting that American policy concerning Native Americans and African-Americans was necessitated by specific racial behaviors essential to each group, rather than dictated by general policies of inequality. Cooper’s text was published in the social context of James Madison’s now infamous 1826 representation of the relationship between removal and slavery: “Next to the black race in our bosom, the red on our borders is the problem most baffling to this country.”⁵ Such racial projections of black identity as an interior dependency and Native American identity as an external threat to the national boundaries function as co-dependent constructions, and thus Cooper’s *Mohicans* demonstrates the perpetual interplay between the construction of black and Native American identities.

African-American writers were not unanimous in accepting or rejecting such divisions. Some such as Ann Plato in “The Natives of America” refer to their “Indian fathers” and a peaceful time when “We all were then as in one band.”⁶ Albery A. Whitman’s “Twasinta’s Seminoles; or Rape of Florida” merges the narrative of African-Americans and Native Americans. Other African-Americans, especially evangelical Christians, referred frequently to Native Americans as “savage” or “pagan” and plainly desired a separate identity from those they considered “uncivilized.” Okah Tubbee and Beckwourth are two of those who worked the racial lines between the red and the black from both sides. *The Life of Okah Tubbee* is an autobiographical account of an African-American who escaped slavery by passing as a Choctaw. Several editions of his *Life*

were published between 1848 and 1852. They were dictated to his wife, Laah Ceil Manatoi Elaah, a Delaware-Mohawk. Okah Tubbee's escape from slavery by changing race was possible because many nineteenth-century Americans conflated blackness with slavery or subservience and the legal system of the United States allowed greater freedom to Native Americans. A little noted aspect of the *Scott v. Sandford* (1857) decision that denied Dred and Mary Scott their freedom on the grounds that blacks had no rights that whites needed to recognize was that red people could become citizens if they left their tribes and lived among and as whites.⁷

Given the circumstances, it hardly comes as a surprise that many African-American writers emphasized that "black" was not synonymous with "slave," "ignorant," or "poor." At the same time, many of these same writers attempted to construct racial unity as potential political power for people of African descent. For example, David Walker writes his 1829 *Appeal* to "the Coloured Citizens of the World" and clearly urges African-Americans to identify themselves and their situation in the United States in terms of global politics based upon color discrimination. He argues that "the inhuman system of *slavery*, is the source from which most of our [people of color] miseries proceed."⁸ On the other hand, his friend and colleague Maria W. Stewart, in a lecture delivered at Franklin Hall in 1832, declared, "Tell us no more of southern slavery; for with few exceptions . . . I consider our [free African-Americans'] condition but little better than that [of enslaved African-Americans]." Stewart's lecture did not suggest that free African-Americans had nothing in common with enslaved ones, but like other African-American writers of that time, she was troubled by ways in which the focus on slavery precluded consciousness about the oppression and suppression of free black people in the US.

Still, for different reasons, the prevailing tendency in American literature, whether by Euro-Americans or by African-Americans, has been to offer slavery as the single most defining social formation through which race and therefore literature about race has been constructed. Such centralization of slavery continues to conflate blackness with subordination and, more interestingly, to suggest that the culture of enslavement defines all "authentic" or "relevant" African-American literatures. Though slavery obviously informs the social context of much African-American literature, slavery does not necessarily provide the only lens through which to consider the African-American literary imagination. Recent scholarship on literacy and literary production in early African America has begun to tell a more complicated story.⁹ Through archival research in the nineteenth-century African-American press and consideration of the activities of African-American churches, mutual aid societies, and educational institutions, scholars have begun to document the prolific and influential writers for whom slavery was but one important issue. When one considers periodicals such as *Freedom's Journal* (1827–9), *The Colored American* (1837–41), and *The Christian Recorder* (1852–), rather than viewing slavery as the unifying element of early African-American literature, it becomes clearer that the pursuit of racial equality, self-definition, the rights of individual citizens, equal participation in the political and legislative process, and access to moral and liberal education were the interlacing ties that bound most writings by nineteenth-century African-Americans.

While the notion of static racial categories informed much nineteenth-century American literature, ironically the mixed-race figure, a character of African and European ancestry, appeared frequently in the nineteenth century. When we consider the integral relationship between race and nation, however, it should not come as a surprise that the notion of a mixed-race figure would intrigue many American writers and thus form a locus of literary discussions of race. Indeed, in *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper alludes to slavery and the relationships between races through his portrayal of the mixed-race heroine, Cora, who is considered by many to be the first mixed-race character in an American novel. The mixed-race figure also introduces a similar kind of cultural import into the works of Lydia Maria Child, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and many others, marking the contrast between the national promise of equality and the realities of racial bias. One might argue, however, that these figures served at least two conflicting purposes: to diminish difference and to police difference. On the one hand, many representations of mixed-race characters relied on the notion of blood identity, or distinct racial traits inherited from black or white blood, suggesting that biological signs of race, whether phenotypical or behavioral would inevitably emerge. Perhaps Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous portrayal of George, the rebellious nearly white slave of her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), best demonstrates this premise. A passage in which a slave owner discusses the possibility of a slave rebellion taking place in the US illuminates the theoretical framework that informs Stowe's characterization of George. Citing blood theory to argue for the potential for an event similar to the Haitian revolution to take place in the US, he declares:

Well there is pretty fair infusion of Anglo Saxon blood among our slaves . . . There are plenty among them who have only enough of the African to give a sort of tropical warmth and fervor to our calculating firmness and foresight. If ever the San Domingo hour comes, Anglo Saxon blood will lead on the day. Sons of white fathers with all our haughty feelings burning in their veins will not always be bought and sold and traded.¹⁰

In contrast to Stowe's representation of mixed-race figures is William Wells Brown's portrayal in *Clotel; or The President's Daughter* (1853). The earliest extant novel published by an African-American author, *Clotel* juxtaposes the ideology of American egalitarianism and the practice of slavery to stake a claim for African-American citizenship. Brown bolsters this claim by destabilizing the categorical construction of race in a novel that weaves fact and fiction, myth and imagination. On the first page of his novel, Brown quotes "John Randolph, a distinguished slaveholder of Virginia, and a prominent statesman . . . that 'the blood of the first American statesmen coursed through the veins of the slave of the South.'"¹¹ According to William Edward Farrison, Brown based his plot upon the real life experiences of a "slave holder named Carter, his quadroon slave housekeeper and paramour, and their daughter Elizabeth." However, scholars report that then as now, many people identified "the President" of the title with Thomas Jefferson, thereby conflating the historical reality of his and Sally Hemmings's children with the other stories. Another important source for

William Wells Brown's novel is Lydia Maria Child's 1842 short story "The Quadroons," published in the *Boston Liberty Bell*. Regardless of the precise sources and references, Brown's novel, like other publications of the time, asserts the fallacy of racial purity and the reality of familial relationships that pierced the very racial categories, supposedly so rigid and reliable that they could function as determinants of citizenship. Using mixed-race characters, who by the very contradiction that they posed between physiognomy and imputed racial identity suggested the constructedness of whiteness, Brown demonstrates representative situations that complicate relationships between race and nationhood in the US.

Similar engagement of a mixed-race character as what Lauren Berlant has called "a national subject, the paradigm problem citizen"¹² is perhaps best represented in the work of nineteenth-century African-American writer, orator, and activist Frances E.W. Harper. Probably the most popular black writer of fiction, essays, and poetry of her time, Harper represents mixed-race characters' lives as metanarratives of national experience. In her Reconstruction novel *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869), Harper engages the trope of racial discovery to consider the identity crisis that the nation underwent during the Civil War. In the novel, Minnie and Louis, who are each born to slave mothers and white fathers, live their lives ignorant of their African ancestry. Having been reared by white families, they discover their African heritage as adults, then commit their lives to the advancement of African-Americans and the building of a more united nation. Confronting the crisis of Reconstruction, *Minnie's Sacrifice* is Harper's portrait of the country's potential for reconciliation after the war. Harper's treatment of mixed-race characters generates narratives of personal and national transition, using individual redefinitions of racial identity to project the possibility of a national transformation initiated by a revision of cultural attitudes about race.

Harper was not alone in her employment of blurred identities as avenues through which to consider American racial ideology. In her 1872 novel *Who Would Have Thought It?*, Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton considers not only the permeability of racial categories, but how class informs the interpretation of race. The novel focuses on the life of Lola, a dark-skinned girl who Dr. Norval has brought as his ward from California to New England. Mrs. Norval's delight at her husband's return has been shattered by the appearance of the girl who she believes must be either Native American or African-American. Despite her involvement in an antislavery organization, Mrs. Norval does not believe in racial equality and does not wish to have a foster daughter of the darker races. Mrs. Norval orders Lola to share sleeping quarters with the Irish servants. But when her husband explains that Lola's parents were wealthy, Mrs. Norval regrets her hasty assumption and plots to ingratiate herself enough to share in the inheritance. Dr. Norval's explanation and his wife's change of tactics, if not of heart, reveal another aspect of the complicated racial politics of that period. Dr. Norval tells his wife that "by the time the little girl is twenty, she will be very rich, and people wouldn't call her Indian or nigger even if she were, which she is not."¹³ Eventually, Mrs. Norval learns that Lola's skin had been dyed in order that she would blend in with the Apaches who had kidnapped her. It turns out that Lola was really of Spanish heritage and therefore

of the same race as her foster parents. As Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita point out, Maria Ruiz de Burton uses Lola's color to critique the hypocrisy of northern abolitionists, whose racism eclipsed their political investments in the antislavery movement. But Ruiz de Burton's critique also rests upon the racial politics of that time which equated dark skin with nonwhite except in particular circumstances – such as being quite wealthy or of Spanish heritage.

That Mrs. Norval sent the presumed “colored” child to sleep with the Irish servants highlights the significance of class or, more precisely, subservience in nineteenth-century racial politics. In the nineteenth century, impoverished Irish immigrants struggled against a racialized identity as “white niggers.” Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* demonstrates how whiteness operated not as a phenotype, but rather as a carefully formulated concept which included labor practices. According to Ignatiev, in American history, “white” has not meant all people scrambled together without regard to religion, language, or country of origin. On the contrary, in every period the “white race” has included only groups that did “white man's work.” In the case of the Irish, “white man's work” could not be defined as work they did when it was precisely their status as “whites” that was in question.¹⁴ Such representations of the Irish as not white highlight how the “the privilege accorded to whiteness relates directly to political, economic, and social factors,” rather than biological ones.¹⁵

The fluidity of supposedly static racial categories is also demonstrated in works by Jewish-American writers. Eric L. Goldstein, in “‘Different Blood Flows in Our Veins’: Race and Jewish Self-Definition in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” notes that the European racial distinctions of Aryan and Semite were less prevalent in the United States “where racial theories grew in response to a history of colonization, slavery and westward expansion.”¹⁶ Instead, Goldstein writes, the “critical distinction was between whites and nonwhites. Thus, while Jews were thought to embody certain distinguishing racial traits, they were still seen as part of the ‘Caucasian’ family of races.”¹⁷ Interestingly, however, Goldstein notes that American Jews themselves defined themselves in racial terms that were “rooted not only in cultural particularity but in biology, shared ancestry and blood.”¹⁸ Such a distinction might work to separate them also from the nonwhites of that era and thus provide a safe space during turbulent times. Of course, the stories of religious and anti-Semitic words and works in US American history are too well known for us to believe that their honorary whiteness carried much social capital in everyday life. And certainly by the late nineteenth century, Jews were discovering, in Goldstein's words, that “their perceived racial peculiarities threatened to place them beyond the pale of whiteness.”¹⁹ Such social context helps explain the rise of periodicals such as *The American Jewess* in 1895 and the frequency with which they published articles such as “Race Characteristics”²⁰ and serialized novels with titles such as “Jewish Blood.”

As did David Walker, Maria W. Stewart, and other earlier authors, later nineteenth-century African-American writers tried to balance calls for racial unity with demonstrations of racial diversity. For example, in the novel *The Garies and Their Friends*, Frank J. Webb depicts middle-class life in Philadelphia that includes a dark-skinned

African-American family, a loving marriage between an African-American woman and a Euro-American man, and a white family headed by Attorney Stevens, a duplicitous lawyer. In her preface to Webb's novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe asserts the novel offers an answer to the popular racialist arguments that blacks were incapable of self-sufficiency. But while the novel's representation of the black middle class challenges white supremacy, Webb complicates the categories of immutable race and class. For example, Stevens dresses himself as a laborer and tries to organize the Irish to riot against the blacks, but he is mistaken for someone else, beaten and covered with tar. Stevens escapes only to be mistaken for a black man by some of his middle-class colleagues, who force him to entertain them. Stevens's transformation from white professional to working-class and finally to black is a metaphor for the slipperiness of nineteenth-century racial politics.

Another example, which stresses willful exploitation by some African-Americans of racial prejudice or ignorance, is the short story "My Baltimore Trip," by Thomas Detter.²¹ The African-American narrator en route from Washington, DC to Baltimore recounts two instances when he manipulated racial assumptions: first when he visited a friend who was passing as white, and second when he stopped at a roadside inn where he was rudely treated and disrespectfully addressed. This ill-treatment of a paying guest, the narrator says, was because of his dark skin, or as he says in contrast to the situation of his "white nigger" friend, it was "owing to my not being half white."²²

Such foci on self-improvement and communal advancement operated as primary themes in nineteenth-century African-American literature and cultural thought. Though strands of self-uplift ideology can be traced throughout African-American literature, as with some Jewish-American writers, the development of a self-uplift ideology became a crucial response to increasing violence, disenfranchisement, and institutional segregation directed towards African-Americans towards the end of the century.

Many recognize the influence of millennium works such as Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901), W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). At that time, despite the fluidity and ambiguity of particular situations, ideas of race had hardened and were propounded with different intentions by whites and colored alike. For example, in "The Conservation of Races" (1897), W.E.B. Du Bois wrote that because race theory in the United States traditionally placed blacks at the bottom of a hierarchy, blacks had tried to "deprecate and minimize race distinctions, to believe intensely that out of one blood God created all nations, and to speak of human brotherhood as though it were the possibility of an already dawning to-morrow."²³ However, Du Bois continued, "we must acknowledge that human beings are divided into races; that in this country the two most extreme types of the world's races have met, and the resulting problem as to the future relations of these types is not only of intense and living interest to us, but forms an epoch in the history of mankind."²⁴

However, prior to the end of the century and these very important texts was a series of writings by African-American women that addressed the social and moral conditions of African-Americans from the perspective of "racial uplift," or as the motto of the National Association of Colored Women founded in 1896 proclaimed, "Lifting

as We Climb.” As with the Jewish-American women, during that period African-American women edited periodicals such as *The Woman’s Era* and wrote poetry, novels, essays and other documents that sought to explain race and how to overcome its negative implications. Among those were Emma Dunham Kelley’s *Medga* (1891), Ida B. Wells’s *Southern Horrors: Lynch Laws in All Its Phases* (1892), Frances E.W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy* (1892), Anna Julia Cooper’s *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* (1892), and Amelia Johnson’s *The Hazeley Family* (1894).

Editor, journalist, and novelist, Pauline Hopkins defines the theory under which most African-American writers were working in this way:

Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs – religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. *No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lie dormant in our history* and, as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race.²⁵

As Hazel Carby, Claudia Tate, and other critics have noted, Hopkins and her cohort hoped that literary works would penetrate a time of lynching and mob violence to reform the state of race relations. Hopkins, for example, used the pages of *The Colored American* to publish essays such as “Famous Men of the Negro Race” and “Famous Women of the Negro Race.” She published short stories such as “Talma Gordon” (1900), which is about an interracial love affair spoiled by racism and one that was not. She published exchanges of letters by blacks, by whites, and between blacks and whites such as those by Hopkins and Cordelia A. Condict, a white reader of *The Colored American*. Believing deeply in the ability of literature to inspire self and communal reformation, Hopkins also serialized *Of one Blood* (1902–3), a novel that plotted genealogies proudly highlighting blood relationship between Africans and African-Americans and thus engaging issues such as colonization and Pan-Africanism.

Hopkins’s editorship of *The Colored American* ended abruptly when the editorial and financial management of the magazine was assumed by Booker T. Washington and Fred Moore. While critical readings of Hopkins’s departure have rightly suggested that gender bias influenced her dismissal, Hopkins’s termination also calls attention to pivotal shifts in the discourse on race at the turn of the century. According to Jennie Kassonoff, with the development of the New Negro ideology the question of who exactly was to represent this so called “New Negro” became central for the black intelligentsia and thus played a role in Hopkins’s dismissal.²⁶ Though the term “New Negro” is often associated with the 1925 publication of Alain Locke’s anthology that adopts the phrase as its title, according to Henry Louis Gates, the term, was largely defined during the years preceding the Harlem Renaissance, between 1895 and 1925.²⁷ Indeed, an anthology entitled *A New Negro for a New Century* appeared in 1900 and included essays by Booker T. Washington and Fannie Barrier Williams and topics as varied as the heroism by black soldiers in the Spanish–American War, industrial education, and gender roles in the struggle for racial uplift. While definitions

of the term “New Negro,” like those of the term “Harlem Renaissance,” have been and continue to be hotly debated among scholars, we might think of it generally as referring to a self-conscious promotion of black artistic expression, political advancement, and economic improvement. Still, we might also consider it as an invention, a self-conscious projection of a black self that would contradict the promotion of black inferiority, which the minstrel performances, plantation fiction, and pseudo-scientific racism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century supported.²⁸

Interestingly, though Hopkins’s supposed lack of representativeness in the face of New Negro ideology may have excluded her from the masthead of *The Colored American*, her belief in the power of literary expression to inspire social protest and ultimately advancement was matched by the New Negro belief that black expression would combat racism. While the traditional separation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century African-American literatures, or more specifically the sentimental works of the nineteenth century and the modernist works of the Harlem Renaissance, in scholarly analyses would suggest a gaping rift between these periods, one that the notion of the New Negro certainly encouraged, we might also consider such continuities and think of the works of Hopkins and other African-American writers at the turn of the century as bridges to a new century of American letters. Indeed, Hopkins’s wish that African-Americans might produce generations which would represent themselves in literature might be thought to have come to fruition in the Harlem Renaissance. African-American writers such as Claude McKay, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Wallace Thurman, Countee Cullen, Anne Spencer, and Georgia Douglas Johnson and others writing on explicitly racial themes found eager publishers and readers. Euro-American writers and literary patrons including Carl Van Vechten, Amy Spingarn and Casper Holstein hosted interracial parties, brokered publishing contracts, literary awards and fellowships for African-American writers. Euro-American writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank, Eugene O’Neill, and William Faulkner found racial themes and African-American characters fertile grounds for their creative minds. It was, as poet Langston Hughes later wrote, a time “When Negroes Were in Vogue” and race was central to American literary politics in open and provocative ways. Still despite this optimism and the good intentions that many of the litterateurs professed, twentieth-century American culture and literature, like that of the prior century, would be profoundly shaped by the myths of race. And the notions of racial difference that shaped the literature to 1900 would reverberate in the centuries to come, morphing in an ever shifting ideological web.

NOTES

- 1 We agree with those, such as the scholars in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (ed.), *Race, Writing and Difference*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, that “race” is a notion with no scientific basis and thus merits enclosure in quotation marks, but in accordance with current grammatical conventions, we will not continue to use quotation marks simply to mark that point.
- 2 While this idea is fairly commonplace today, in the 1960s Gossett was one of the early race theorists. See, for example, the first two

- chapters in Thomas F. Gossett. *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1963). New York: Schocken Books, 1965.
- 3 Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible*. New York: New York University Press, 1998, p. 37.
 - 4 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Random House, 1993, p. 65.
 - 5 James Madison, *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison*. Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1865, p. 516. Madison made this statement in a letter to Thomas L. McKenny dated February 10, 1826.
 - 6 Ann Plato, *Essays; Including Biographies and Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose and Poetry* (1841). New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 111.
 - 7 For an interesting analysis of two benchmark legal cases see Michael A. Elliott, "Telling the Difference: Nineteenth-Century Legal Narratives of Racial Taxonomy." *Law and Social Inquiry* 24 (3): 611–36, 1999.
 - 8 David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829*, The University Library of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill August 5, 2004, August 21, 2004 docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/walker.html.
 - 9 See for example, Frances Smith Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production of African American Women, 1746–1892*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; Todd Vogel (ed.) *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001; and Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
 - 10 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852). New York: Penguin, 1998, p. 392.
 - 11 William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* (1853), ed. William Edward Farrison. New York: Carol Publishing, 1969, p. 59.
 - 12 Lauren Berlant, "National Brands/National Body: Imitation of Life," in Hortense J. Spillers (ed.), *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*. New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 113.
 - 13 Maria Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872). Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1995, p. 27.
 - 14 Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 112.
 - 15 Babb, 13. This shifting category of whiteness, however, could operate as a sort of double-edged sword. Not only was the designation used to exclude, but because of the privileges that it afforded, it could also be used against the very people who claimed it. As David R. Roediger points out, "The pleasures of whiteness could function as 'wage' for white workers. That is, status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships." *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1999, p. 13.
 - 16 Eric L. Goldstein, "Different Blood Flows in Our Veins: Race and Jewish Self-Definition in Late Nineteenth Century America." *American Jewish History* 85 (1): 29–55, 1997.
 - 17 Goldstein, 1997: 37.
 - 18 Goldstein, 1997: 29.
 - 19 Goldstein, 1997: 54.
 - 20 These are both found in the 1896 volumes (2.7–2.11) of *The American Jewess*.
 - 21 Thomas Detter, *Nellie Brown; or The Jealous Wife, with Other Sketches* (1871), ed. Frances Smith Foster. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996, pp. 105–8.
 - 22 Detter, p. 107.
 - 23 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of the Races" (1897) rpt in *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings*. New York: The Library of America, 1986, pp. 815–26.
 - 24 Du Bois, p. 815.
 - 25 Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900). New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 13–14.
 - 26 Jennie Kassonoff, "Fate Has Linked Us Together: Blood, Gender, and the Politics of Representation in Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*," in John Cullen Gruesser (ed.), *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996, pp. 158–81.

- 27 Henry Louis Gates, "The Face and Voice of Blackness," in Guy C. McElroy (ed.), *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710–1940*. San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1990, pp. xxix–xliv.
- 28 See Gates, 1990: xxxiii.

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19

American Regionalism

Susan K. Harris

I like to start thinking about turn-into-the-twentieth-century American regionalism by way of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*, published in 1885. Even though both de Burton and her novel stand beyond most readers' assumptions that regionalist writing primarily reflects the interests of Protestant, northeastern or southern literary establishments, *The Squatter and the Don* nevertheless features most of the issues that more readily-recognizable regionalist writing tackles: questions of place, and of particular peoples and their histories in that place; questions of borders: geographic, demographic, and social; the relationship between the local and the national, and among the local, the national, and the global.

Ruiz de Burton was a Californio, a term that can describe all the people who lived in the southern and/or baja California region at the time, following the Mexican War, when it was annexed by the United States. For de Burton, however, a Californio was specifically an American-born aristocrat of Spanish descent. *The Squatter and the Don* is about the conflict between Anglos and Californios over who was actually going to possess the thousands of acres that had been originally deeded the Californios either by Spanish or Mexican authorities but that were now subject to US law. Although the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) guaranteed Californios their hereditary lands, in fact every legal and illegal means was used to dispossess them. Claiming that all land grants had to be reviewed for legitimacy before they could be recognized, Americans – Anglos – claimed parcels of the old ranches under the Homestead Act, and squatted on them while the lawsuits dragged on. In the end, not surprisingly, the Anglos won.

This historical background is the stage for de Burton's saga of two families, the land each claims as its own, and their comparative lifestyles. Because she depicts her Anglos as "squatters," ugly men of uncertain caste, and her Californios as "Dons," aristocratic families whose descent from the best of European culture is manifest, de Burton fuses questions of class with demographic history. At the same time, the original inhabitants of the land – Native-Americans – are almost entirely occluded. Race matters are presented as a conflict between Californios and Anglos; for modern readers, they also

appear in their absence, in the author's almost total disregard for people of color in general and for working people of color in particular. Land matters not only focus on ownership but also on use: the Don, who has lived in the area his entire life, knows that the semi-arid land is best for free ranging cattle, fruit trees, and vineyards; the Anglos, who have recently arrived from New England and the Midwest, try to force it to bear grain. Finally, the battle over the Texas Pacific railroad, which San Diegans hoped would link their city to the old South and create a conduit for commerce between the United States and Asia, brings up the relationship of the region to the nation and onward to global commerce. *The Squatter and the Don's* claim to a place among the regionalist canon, then, stems from its focus on a particular geographical region, the region's demography, and the land's use-value; matters of race and class as they define demographic issues within the region; and relationships between local, national, and global economies.

American literary regionalism has not always been looked at in this way. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a group of American writers focused on the peculiarities of specific regions as a way to celebrate ethnic, cultural, and geographic disparities. In addition to wanting to capture the sights and sounds of those regions before they disappeared, these early regionalists were resisting a critical move to define a certain kind of writing, especially as manifested in the novel, as particularly "American." Rather than embracing the concept of a monolithic national literature, they celebrated regionalism as a counter-mode to dominant, or master, narratives. As Hamlin Garland put it in *Crumbling Idols*, it was "the differences which interest us" (Garland, 1060: 49). For Mary Austin, region as a concept was central to the development of good fiction: "there is no sort of experience that works so constantly and subtly upon man as his regional environment," she claimed. "It orders and determines all the direct, practical ways of his getting up and lying down, of staying in and going out, of housing and clothing and food-getting" (Austin, 1996: 128, 132). With this as her basic premise, Austin defined regionalist writing as "fiction which has come up through the land, shaped by the author's own adjustments to it . . . works which are colored, not only by the land, but by the essence of a period, a phase of its social development, a racial bias, a time element too short to develop essential characteristics" (p. 134).

Austin's and Garland's essays raise two continuing disputes over regionalism. The first concerns terminology, and the second concerns our frameworks for understanding what it means to turn away from literary representations of "the nation." Fused with this latter, the question of language, especially as concerns regional dialects, and the status of regionalism in the hierarchy of literary modes, constitute two more continuing issues in discussions of literary regionalism. Much of the confusion over what regionalism "is" stems from the fact that definitions have changed both over time and in accord with shifting (and sometimes competing) critical agendas. Additionally, the relationship of "region" to "nation" has shifted not only in accord with literary critical agendas but also with political agendas in the general culture. Perhaps more than any other literary movement, regionalism has responded to, and therefore exhibited the effects of, the dynamics of American politics as they have played themselves out in questions of representation.

Terminology, especially as regards the terms “regionalism” and “local color,” has been a contentious issue throughout the movement’s history, in large part because many critics see “local color” and “regionalist” as incorporating radically different approaches to their subjects. For Garland, “local color” was the authentic, and therefore desirable, kind of writing, in contrast to what he called “the picturesque,” which was produced by commercial writers out to skim surface impressions for an indiscriminating readership. For other commentators, the term “local color” designates tourist art (a latter-day term for Garland’s “picturesque”), and “regionalism” designates serious attempts to fathom the characters and characteristics of a particular area. For late twentieth-century feminists, the differences between “local color” and “regionalist” writing suggest gendered approaches to writing the local. Rather than engaging in the work of categorizing and discriminating, I prefer to see turn-into-the-twentieth-century regionalist writing along a continuum that considers not only treatment but also writers’ goals and readers’ responses, marketplace constraints, and, not least, successive waves of critical approaches. For the purposes of this chapter, then, I am using the terms “regionalism” and “local color” interchangeably.

The dispute about the relationship between region and nation subsumes questions of style, language, politics (including gender and race politics), and mode. Mid-twentieth-century academic critics, in particular, saw regionalism less as a writerly response to the critical attempt to create national master-narratives, as Austin and Garland had seen it, and more as a turning away from the political and economic concept of nation, especially as transportation and communication technologies erased regional differences. These critics couched the debate in evaluative terms, and their ambivalence about the stylistic merits of a literature that sought to represent the range of American characters, languages, and values reflects their own conflicting critical agendas. Following William Dean Howells, the powerful late nineteenth-century writer and editor who championed many of the regionalist writers, most mid-twentieth-century critics began with the premise that regionalism is a subcategory of realism, and that realism is, or should be, America’s dominant literary mode. At the same time, however, these traditionalists were ambivalent about the *worth* of regionalist writing; they tended to waver between celebrating it, especially as manifested in the stylistically elegant work of Sarah Orne Jewett, and denigrating it as vulgar, pedestrian, and static. Carlos Baker, in his essay “Delineation of Life and Character” in the 1948 *Literary History of the United States*, is a good example of the evaluative ambivalence of these mid-century critics. Baker summed up the debate in terms of contemporary criticism, posing B.A. Botkin against Allan Tate. According to Baker, Botkin celebrated regionalist writing as a turn away from the “the belletristic – pure literature and absolute poetry – toward a social and cultural art,” while Tate argued that regionalism led to “a falsification of creative impulse with the motives of social action” (860).

These quotations suggest how vulnerable regionalist writing is to current critical trends, whatever they may be. Botkin, a literary historian whose best-known work is his *Treasury of American Folklore*, valued regionalist writing for what it said about American cultural history, while Tate, one of the most famous of the New Critics,

denigrated it for the same reasons – *because* they were implicated in cultural history, regionalist writings could not be measured by the criteria New Critics valued most: internal complexity and stylistic consistency. Baker himself negotiates these positions cautiously, noting that regionalism’s “limitations are clear enough, [consisting of] absorption with the picturesque for its own sake . . . the curious pursuit of the unique, idiosyncratic, or grotesque in local character” and “a . . . tendency to gloss over the uglier aspects of the human predicament.” Baker was particularly put off by “the predilection for dialect . . . in which authors played at amateur phonetics under the mistaken impression that the use of heavily apostrophized contractions, barbaric misspellings, and other desperate expedients would be useful to future linguistic historians” (p. 860). On the positive side, he valued the regionalists’ redemption of a usable past, and their recognition of “the richness, abundance, and variety of the American scene as a field for literary exploitation” (860). In pairing Botkin and Tate, Baker exhibited the difficulties of “doing” literary criticism in an era sharply divided between champions of high style and champions of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Baker’s contempt for dialect writing points to the third issue of continuing debate about regionalist writing. As James M. Cox pointed out in his essay on regionalism for the 1988 *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, language has been central to discussions about regionalism across critical periods. School board fights and writing manuals notwithstanding, Americans have never been sure just which English dialect should constitute the “Standard” “American” tongue. This cultural dispute arose in tandem with regionalist writing, and the history of the literary mode can be seen as a reflection of the struggle to create a linguistic hierarchy in the larger culture.

During the tumultuous years following the Civil War, it became clear to those interested in such matters that the regional dialect posited as the norm was going to possess considerable cultural force. The means of establishing that hegemony lay with newspapers and the periodical press, which, also as a result of improved communications and transportation technologies, reached an extraordinary number of readers. Hence the power of a periodical such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, with its succession of strong-minded editors and its position as the mouthpiece for the Boston literati. Hence too, the power of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, which bought into the *Atlantic’s* readership when it invited the *Atlantic’s* editor, William Dean Howells, to head its “Editor’s Study” section in 1886. Commentators have generally seen Howells’s move from Cambridge to Manhattan as a sign that cultural authority in the United States had shifted from Boston to New York, but another way of looking at it is as a sign of the cultural ascendance of the New England literati over the linguistic destiny of the nation. In capturing Howells, a symbol of New England high culture despite his own midwestern origins, the New York publishing world was tacitly acknowledging submission to the values and speech modes of the New England establishment, a group that tended to be Protestant, politically liberal, economically entrepreneurial, and white. In constituting themselves and their dialect as the norm, the New Englanders simultaneously constituted all other Americans (and their dialects) as deviations.

Coups like this were not remarkable in the late nineteenth century; nationalism, the movement to unify historically contentious groups in the name of the fatherland and in the interests of whichever group was most successful at achieving hegemony, was rampant in much of Europe and the Americas, and the struggle between competing factions over who was going to be recognized as representing the “nation” and who was going to be marginalized as representing a “region” was only the North American manifestation of a global process. From a historical viewpoint, Howells was the representative of this process for the American literary scene, and his most important contribution to the struggle between the national and the local was his encouragement of writers who portrayed the characteristics of a specific group, in a specific place. As editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* he published regionalist writers; as the pontiff of *Harper's* “Editor’s Study” (later “Editor’s Easy Chair”), his dicta carried the power to shape both American realism (as treatment) and American regionalism (as subject matter). For literary historians, he has always figured as *the* representative of the editorial interests, demands, and constraints of the literary marketplace in the latter decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries.

The combination of Howells’s editorial directives and existing modes for local color characters is the literary “stew” out of which much regionalist writing emerged. Within this, language, as the site of the national battle for regional dominance, was always a, perhaps *the*, most pressing issue. For most of the early regionalists, the way to represent local color characters was through a rhetorical framework that went back at least 50 years, to the tradition of T.B. Thorpe’s “Big Bear of Arkansas” and other antebellum writings, most from the Old South. We can see the process of “writing region” in the interplay of dialects featured in those early and mid-nineteenth-century stories and sketches. Rhetorically, these framed stories “contained” local color characters and their speech-modes through a mediating narrator whose own dialect and values reflected that region’s dominant class. At the very least, the narrators’ voices began and ended their tales; many also manipulated readers’ points of view in the body of the narrative as well. The result was a dialectic between the narrators who told the tales and the characters the narrators represented. Since the framing narrator usually had the last word, both his dialect and his values triumphed.

Late nineteenth-century regionalist writers worked within this tradition in part because it was the only way they knew how to represent regional characters and in part because they were encouraged by Howells and his fellow editors, whose enthusiasm for this kind of local color was fueled as much by a desire to encourage writing that would entertain their readers and encourage sales as by a desire to establish a literature that differed from its European precursors. The result, in much early local color writing, is a form – often a formula – in which regional characters and their speech-modes are projected as either quaint or downright barbaric. In these early days, local color writing functioned less to celebrate “difference” than to establish a linguistic hierarchy. As feminist critics of the late twentieth century would point out, the *form* of early American local color writing encouraged readers to identify with an established elite against regionalist characters who were almost inevitably presented as, at best, aberrant, and at worst, bizarre.

Some regionalist writers learned how to work their way out of this box, however. Sensing that the standard form for presenting region made figuring local characters as socially and intellectually inferior almost unavoidable, writers sought ways around the standard forms for representing local characters. The pivotal figure here of course is Mark Twain; when, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, he decided to let his vernacular character take over the narration, he opened a whole new rhetorical form. In the process, he radically changed the politics of regionalism as well, for in making Huck the spokesman (albeit unwittingly) for the novel's moral viewpoint – and in imbricating that viewpoint into the national debate over race – Twain created a way for subsequent regionalist writers to seize the moral imperative. Whereas pre-*Huck Finn* local color characters tended to be both behaviorally bizarre and morally reprehensible (George Washington Harris's Sut Lovingood is a prime example here), post-*Huck Finn* local color writers could combine regional peculiarities with moral centrality, thus provoking vigorous discussions about the relation of dialect, style, class, cultural power, and moral probity. The payoff for this evolution became evident in the twentieth century, especially in African-American writing, which used region and dialect to point out the gross disparities between popular white representations of black life and the moral and emotional complexities of that life as lived from the inside. Historically, then, regionalism has been a mode in which crucially important battles have been waged over language, and especially over what kinds of people, both ethnically and morally, various dialects represent.

Finally, regionalism's status as a "major" or a "minor" literary mode has been a subject of continuing debate. This aspect of the dispute is imbricated both with the battle for linguistic dominance and with debates about gender. The argument about whether regionalism is a major or a minor mode began in contemporary assessments of Sarah Orne Jewett's work, and broadened to the rest of turn-into-the-twentieth-century regionalism. Henry James had been the first to label Jewett's writing "limited" ("minor"), and the word, taken pejoratively even if not meant that way, became a means of denigrating regionalist writing in general. As a result of the association of its best practitioner (generally agreed to be Jewett) with the notion of "lesser," regionalism became gendered, especially when critics assumed that because many of the most popular regionalist writers were women, the genre must reflect some peculiarly feminine trait. Other associations quickly followed suit; while the earlier writers like Austin and Garland had celebrated regionalism because it did not attempt to speak for the entire nation, twentieth-century critics came to equate "non-national" with "non-masculine," and "local" with "domestic." In practice, the label "minor" became a pejorative that segregated the genre as precious, fugitive, "lesser," . . . feminine.

The late twentieth century saw an especially vigorous response to this designation from the recently revived women's movement. Whereas mid-twentieth-century critics had designated regionalist writing as "minor" because it turned away from the master-narrative (increasingly celebrated in its manifestation in works such as *Moby-Dick*, *Huck Finn*, *U.S.A.*, *On the Road*, and *Rabbit Run*) and because it was often practised by women, literary feminists recovered American regionalism, especially as practised in

New England, as a “major” literary mode that centered women’s issues and points of view on the literary horizon instead of men’s. Writers such as Jewett, who has always been central to the struggles over the relative valuation of regionalist writings, or Mary Austin, whose works very self-consciously center women’s point of view, were “recovered” (Jewett had never really been lost, only downplayed) and celebrated as articulating an alternate vision of American reality.

Two of the major advocates of this approach are Judith Fetterley, who has demonstrated that the critical association of women and region implicitly assumed that women’s point of view was antithetical to “nation” and therefore “un-American,” and Marjorie Pryse, who uses standpoint theory to describe the cultural locations from which regionalist writing springs (Pryse, 1994; Fetterley and Pryse, 2003). Writing within the terms of the late twentieth-century debate over canon formation, Fetterley notes the current critical argument that “what we currently accept as American literature implicitly and explicitly defines as American only certain persons and only the stories that serve the interests of those persons” (Fetterley, 1994: 879). As a result, she observes, most literature currently being designated as both “American” and “major” was also male. In response, Fetterley suggests, regionalism made a space for women’s – and especially poor, old, and disabled women’s – experiences. “In seeking to empower persons made silent or vacant through terror to tell stories which the dominant culture labels trivial,” Fetterley claims, “regionalism seeks to change our perspective and thus to destabilize the meaning of margin and center” (p. 887). This process can be associated “with the category of American, seeking thus to unsettle . . . our understanding of that term” (p. 887). In this article, as well as in *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (2003), which Pryse and Fetterley co-authored, these critics not only expose the unspoken gender bias of much earlier critical assessments of regionalism, they also suggest that regionalism is a counter-genre to the works that latter-day twentieth-century critics sought to label “great.” In thus resituating regionalist literature, especially as manifested in the sketch and the short story, as a major literary mode, feminist critics have at once challenged easy associations of “big,” “male,” and “nation” and also opened the door, not necessarily intentionally, for critical assessments of regionalist writers that focus on issues frequently (as with de Burton) occluded in regionalist writings, especially issues of class and race.

The other important late twentieth-century development in the critical assessment of regionalist writing came out of cultural and postcolonial studies. Like the feminist critics, this most recent critical camp also inverted the traditionalists’ reading of regionalism as a turning away from nationalism, in this case seeing the focus on regional issues as a reflection of national and even international concerns. Thus, for instance, the fact that few young men appear in Sarah Orne Jewett’s stories of the Maine coast, which the traditionalists read as “quaint” and the feminists as evidence of a strong women’s community, this critical wave reads economically, as evidence of the depressed condition of turn-of-the-century New England, when able-bodied men (who a generation before would have shipped out on merchant or whaling ships) left their villages and farms to seek employment in the cities. Similarly, critics interested

in reflecting the country's racial or ethnic diversity have focused on the groups marginalized or ignored in much regionalist writing – such as people of color in de Burton, or Asians in much turn-into-the-twentieth-century California literature. In some instances, critics read the writers' foregrounding of one or two ethnic groups as evidence that regionalism, in America, must be inherently exclusionist, even racist.

All three readings of regionalism – the one evolving out of regionalist writers' own theorizing of their practice, which we can call "traditional"; the feminist, and the post-colonial or cultural studies approach – have much in common: all see the focus on land and its uses as primary, all take interest in the peculiarities of the "native" inhabitants, all note the conflicts between competing claims for the land and the way it is to be used. The differences lie in emphasis on different aspects of these issues and evaluation of their significance. Clearly, for literary feminists women's communities and affective bonds are the most signal portion, whereas the most recent wave sees economics and race relations as playing the most significant, even where unspoken, role. Which element is seen as most significant also depends on which region is considered most representative; commentators who focus on New England tend to see gender as a major factor, whereas commentators who focus on the South tend to see race. Moreover neither of the new waves has shaken the question of the genre's designation as "minor"; the label tends to be discussed, debated, defended, and redefined by each newcomer to the conversation.

What, then, does turn-into-the-twentieth-century American regionalism look like, now, in the early years of the twenty-first century? Much of the landscape – and many of the authors – resemble the landscapes surveyed by critics from the 1940s on. New England's preeminence as the stronghold of regionalist writing received a new boost from feminist critics, who celebrate Jewett for her depictions of women's communities and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman for her sketches of poor, idiosyncratic, and frequently elderly women whose stories, and lives, reflect the intensely local and whose capacity for resistance marks the quintessence of the New England character. With this, the recent rise of environmental literary criticism has sparked new interest in writers such as Celia Thaxter who, although well known in her own time as a poet and essayist celebrating the Isle of Shoals (off the coast of New Hampshire), had been marginalized as a literary figure in large part because critics had not known how to categorize her subject and genres. Cultural critics focus on New England as well, but for this group, race matters take precedence over gender or geographical matters. Amy Kaplan's essay "Nation, Region, and Empire," for instance, reads the tightly knit New England communities as "clans," and argues that regionalist literature appealed to readers because it ignored social and racial diversity: "by rendering social differences in terms of region, anchored and bound by separate spaces, more explosive social conflicts of class, race, and gender made contiguous by urban life could be effaced" (Kaplan, 1991: 251). At the heart of all these evaluations, from Garland on, is the concept of "difference," but which differences "matter" depends very much on the values the critic brings to bear.

Critical methodologies aside, the four regions of the United States that were most featured in traditional surveys of American regionalism of the past remain the most featured today. In addition to New England, the Midwest, the old South, and, to a

somewhat lesser extent, California, constitute the geographical areas most often discussed as sources of local color writing. The list of authors has expanded, however, in part because critics have come to recognize that writing designated “regionalist” need not be exclusively that; that regionalist fiction in particular can also be categorized in other ways. Frank Norris’s *McTeague*, for instance, is intensely regionalist in its depiction of San Francisco and of the southern California desert, but the realism of its geographical depictions is skewed by its equally intense naturalism and by its characters, who border on the grotesque. In this case, a regionalist-driven urge to represent the local is offset by a social Darwinist urge to depict the devolution of marginally “civilized” human beings. Rather than forcing *McTeague* into one category, it is most useful to see it as a generic hybrid and to discuss its multiple intentions.

Expanding critical perceptions of the multiple genres featured in regionalist texts also enable us to expand the regionalist canon. For instance, whereas Hamlin Garland’s fiction has always been central to midwestern local color literature, the theme of “exile and return” that marks stories like “Up the Cooley” also appears in works like Zitkala-Sa’s autobiographical *American Indian Tales*, a work that is generally discussed under the rubrics of Native American or ethnic writing but that is as firmly – and as self-consciously – located in the geographical, historical, and cultural milieu of the upper Midwest as Garland’s *Wisconsin* or Willa Cather’s *Nebraska*. As I noted earlier, a similar case can be made for counting de Burton’s *The Squatter and the Don* as a California novel; still another can be made for Abraham Cahan’s stories of Jewish immigrants living on New York’s lower East side. And while Charles Chesnut’s *Conjure Tales* and novels set in the South have long had their place in the regionalist canon, an expanded definition of regionalist interests yields a way to approach Chesnut’s efforts, in his “stories of the color line,” to identify and “place” a third American race. These works all manifest Mary Austin’s claim that regional environment “orders and determines all the direct, practical, ways . . . of staying in and going out, of housing and clothing and food-getting” (Austin: 128).

The critical shift consists in foregrounding geographic and climactic factors less and social ones more, especially as the social concerns the interactions of particular demographic groups. Zitkala-Sa’s *Dakota Sioux*, already dislocated onto reservations and experiencing successive waves of culture loss and replacement, are not much different from Cahan’s *Jews*, already dislocated from Eastern Europe to a two-square-mile area of New York City and also experiencing successive waves of culture loss and replacement. In all these works, geography and climate are the material – even the sensual – grounds upon which demographic and cultural changes are measured. The “new” regionalism, then, rather than assuming that the particularities of place mandate stasis and that the work of regionalism is essentially nostalgic, instead assumes that the particularities of place provide the stable environment against which the inevitable reconfigurations of the American experience can be gauged.

Rather than a rejection of the notion of “nation,” this new regionalism also shifts the idea of nation from a monolithic landmass with a homogeneous population to a multifaceted geography with a multicultural, multigendered, population. It also opens

the door to further discussion of exactly what relation writers should – or need – have in relation to the region about which they write. The general assumption about turn-into-the-twentieth-century regionalist writers has been that they grew up in their given geographical area and that they wrote from those “roots.” However anyone looking closely at the living patterns of regionalist writers will note that many, perhaps most, wrote about places where they were no longer living. This is one argument for labeling regionalism “nostalgic” – the label assumes that the writers are looking backwards, trying to redeem the past. But there are other ways to look at the relationship of writer to land, and that is as evoking a moving panorama of difference and change within the national imaginary. Mark Twain, for instance, wrote from and about at least three American regions: the Mississippi River from Hannibal to New Orleans, the Western mining region, and south-central New England. But his writings do not perform a nostalgic redemption of an idealized past. Rather, they document the social customs peculiar to specific regions and their effects on the human beings living there, including the extraordinary amount of violence that seems to accompany all facets of American life. *Roughing It* and his stories and sketches of the western mining region record murder, fraud, and physical fights. Hank Morgan, the quintessential New Englander of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, combines his Yankee passion for problem-solving with a penchant for blowing things up. Even *Tom Sawyer*, perhaps Twain's most “nostalgic” work, weaves its evocation of landscape with histories of murder, depictions of lost and starving children, and threats of kidnapping and rape. Rather than writing from one place and time, Twain functions as a moving camera, recording American lives as they are lived and inflected in and from multiple locations, time frames, and social histories.

From this perspective, turn-into-the-twentieth-century regionalist writing becomes a mode exhibiting the dynamic interplay between place and populace, between the land itself, the impact of the land on those growing up in the region, the uses of the land by successive waves of human inhabitants, and the conflicts generated by their contesting interests. When Hamlin Garland notes the evolution of Wisconsin agriculture from small-family farms to agribusiness, he is also tracking the transformation of immigrants into Americans and of independent entrepreneurs into managers. When George Washington Cable, in *The Grandissimes*, traces the complex racial history of New Orleans from the Tchoupitoulas Indians through successive families of Africans, Spaniards, Frenchmen, and Yankees, he is not only exhibiting the conflicts between those groups, he is also showing how each left its impress upon the region's agriculture, architecture, and commerce. When Zitkala-Sa observes her mother's habitation change from hide teepee to canvas teepee to log hut, she is tracking the devolution of Dakota-Sioux culture through the material transformations of her relatives' lives. Rooted in the particulars of place, this “new” regionalism differs from “old” regionalisms in that it takes time and change as its subject matter as much as climate and topography. In this conception of American literature, writings about “region” interface *with* rather than turn away *from* writings about “nation.” Far from describing separate levels of American experience, American regionalist writings describe the shifting

demographic and cultural conditions under which “difference” exists in disparate, and yet intimately linked, American terrains.

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Magazines and Fictions

Ellen Gruber Garvey

From the late nineteenth century on, writers learned to write for magazines, and readers learned what to want to read, and how to pay attention to it, through magazines. Their role in shaping a national culture in a sprawling nation came relatively late in the progression of US publishing, since magazines remained local in orientation and distribution until the mid-nineteenth century. Their circulations continued to be small until later in the century. US magazines initially grew out of miscellanies, annuals, and story papers. The strong effect English periodicals exerted extended to the contents: until the late nineteenth century, US periodicals often leaned heavily on reprints, pirated or paid for from English periodicals.

Magazines' relationship to literature that continues to be read and studied is a meandering one. Especially in the nineteenth century, the magazines that published the US writers who have since become canonical were not generally read by masses of people, while the largest portions of fiction and poetry that appeared in story papers and other cheap publications of the 1850s through 1880s with wide circulations are rarely reprinted or read today. Until recently, literary scholars considering the mid- to late nineteenth century concentrated on the four "class monthlies": *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Scribner's*, and *The Century*, booklike magazines which sold for 25–35 cents per issue. They addressed a small albeit culturally influential audience with a leisurely mix of long essays, stories, serialized works, ongoing departments with titles like "Editor's Easy Chair" or "Bric-à-Brac," and in some, a few illustrations.

With the growth of feminism and cultural studies has come greater interest in learning what ordinary people read; scholars have turned attention to the wider variety of periodicals that reached different publics such as working-class readers, rural readers, immigrants, and the new middle class of the late nineteenth century. One focus has been the middle-class ten-cent magazines begun in the 1890s, which had wide circulations and published authors who have retained their prominence. These new magazines were dependent on advertising, and because charges for advertising space rose with circulation and needed larger numbers than magazines that based their

profits on their actual sales, magazine publishers drew readers by advertising and promoting the authors they published. They thus created a new kind of celebrity, keeping authors' names in the public eye and using the interest they thereby generated in them to sell magazines.

Even the early and mid-nineteenth century magazines were, however, important to the literary figures who published in them: Henry David Thoreau's first appearance in print was in the first issue of the transcendentalist magazine, *The Dial*, in 1840; he continued to publish there, and appeared in *Sartain's Union Magazine* with sections from *Walden* in 1852 and in *Putnam's* with his "Excursion to Canada" and "Cape Cod," in 1853 and 1855. Margaret Fuller edited and wrote extensively for *The Dial*, but *The Dial* never had more than 300 subscribers. Magazines did not become a significant national mass medium until the late nineteenth century; they continued in that role until conclusively displaced by television in the mid-twentieth century.

The Development of Nineteenth-Century Magazines

Several substantial jolts mark the growth of magazines as a mass medium of communication in the nineteenth century. The Civil War set off an avid interest in reading newspapers and periodicals, which continued after the war, aided by the rise of cheap dailies. Before 1880, available printing technology kept numbers down; distribution was mainly local or regional. The expanded reach of railroads made a more timely orientation in the magazines possible, since publishers could now rely on punctual delivery. Railroads eased distribution costs, too, as the Post Office rate scale favored periodicals over books and other matter: rates set in 1879 charged three cents per half ounce for first class postage, but only two cents per pound for periodicals.

Technological innovations after 1880 allowed publishers to mechanize and increase production, taking advantage of economies of scale. An 1880s sulfite process of converting wood pulp to paper dramatically increased the papermaking industry's production capacity and lowered prices. Linotype machines introduced by Ottmar Mergenthaler made typesetting cheaper and faster, and increased capacity. Presses changed too: rotary presses fed paper faster and ran more cheaply, while the new Hoe presses, taken up first by newspapers and then by magazines, allowed for new kinds of illustration processes, moving magazines from reliance on wood cuts and wood engravings to longer lasting, mechanically reproducible zinc and steel engravings, and eventually half-tone photographic reproduction. Magazine historian Frank Luther Mott calls the new half-tone technology decisive; it allowed magazines that were relatively cheaply produced to look very much like the best of the illustrated "class monthlies" if they wanted, but it also allowed for even more extensive – and to nineteenth-century eyes, more attractive – illustration, with magazines studded with photographs. By 1893, even *The Century*, with a reputation built on wood engraving, used some half tones. Wood engravings cost it up to \$300; half tones went for \$20, while printing a full page photo became cheaper than it cost to print a page of writing. It is not surprising,

then, that the number of magazines increased by more than a thousand between 1885 and 1890 (Mott, 1957: 11).

Other industries took advantage of railroads to centralize manufacture and to distribute products widely, while new processing and manufacturing technologies created economies of scale for goods formerly processed and distributed locally, like oats and soap, or newly manufactured goods, like bicycles and snapshot cameras. Manufacturers needed to regularize demand for their products, and sought national outlets for their advertising.

The match between magazines, advertisers, and the middle-class reader/consumer who was interested in new products, had access to stores, and money to spend on these new products produced what has been called the *ten-cent magazine revolution*, usually dated to 1893, when three general-interest middle-class magazines in formats similar to the class monthlies – *Munsey's*, *McClure's*, and *Cosmopolitan* (not related to the present women's magazine) – dropped their prices to ten cents, and shifted from depending on magazine sales to depending on advertising. Since ten cents was less than it cost to produce the magazine, the magazine publisher was no longer selling the magazine to the consumer, but essentially selling the reader to the advertiser. These new magazines and many others that followed addressed a rising middle class of lower-level professionals and managers who identified with their modern products; shared attitudes toward business, culture, and politics; and learned of and solidified their tastes through these magazines. They were invited to participate in a community of readers with similar stances: urban or suburban rather than rural; fast-moving and striving; and aloof from immigrants, African-Americans and poor people, even if not native born themselves. The advent of the ten-cent advertising-dependent magazines marked shifts in editing practices as well.

In William Dean Howells's 1890 novel, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, the genteel magazine launched in the course of the novel, *Every Other Week*, is a useful point of comparison for discussing some of the changes in the magazine industry in the 1880s and 1890s. Although *Every Other Week* is repeatedly spoken of as something very up to date, in most respects it falls in line with the practices of the older, elite publications, with which Howells had been associated since the 1860s (Lynn, 1970: 96 ff.).

Hazard positions *Every Other Week* as an artistic, literary enterprise, the antithesis of business. When Basil March is first offered its editorship, he would be giving up a career in business to take up this work; he is sought for his amateur talents as a writer, not his business experience. On the other hand, the magazine is to be run from New York, not Boston; that is, from the nation's commercial center, rather than its old-guard literary one. In this, *Every Other Week* is in step with its newer non-elite contemporaries. Boston's once formidable *Atlantic Monthly*, of which Howells had been assistant editor and then editor for 15 years until 1881, was hardly a vital force by this period, claiming a circulation in 1887 of only 12,500 and dropping to 7,000 by 1898 (Mott, 1957: 44). The other three so-called "quality" or "class" magazines, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (for which Howells wrote a regular column), *The Century*, and *Scribner's*, were all published in New York, as was *Cosmopolitan*, which Howells was to

briefly co-edit in 1892 shortly before it joined the ranks of the ten-cent monthlies. (*Hazard* itself was first serialized in *Harper's Weekly*, owned along with *Harper's Monthly* by the Harpers' publishing firm.)

What March is to contribute to the magazine is taste; the previous experience of Fulkerson, the business and advertising manager, includes the syndication of fiction to groups of papers – work parallel to that of S.S. McClure, founder of what was soon to become the ten-cent *McClure's Magazine*, eventually best remembered for muckraking articles. Fulkerson insists that the magazine be stocked with unsolicited stories. In this respect, *Every Other Week* is out of step with the more activist and managerial practices of editors who were to take hold in the 1890s. Rather, Basil March is like the earlier Gilded Age editors and gentleman publishers who did not actively solicit manuscripts, but waited for the magazines' contents to arrive at the "Editor's Study" or the "Editor's Easy Chair," as names of columns in two of the elite magazines suggestively labeled their workspaces, suitable for scholars and gentlemen. They would then sift and select from them, while guarding boundaries of social and artistic propriety (Wilson, 1983: 45). (An 1892 advertising trade journal satirized this tendency to drowsy passivity, referring to the "Editor's Spare Room," "Editor's Folding Bed," and "Editor's Easy Socks" ["Our New Department," 170]). So before material spontaneously begins to pour in, March suffers a "thirst for employment" (Howells, 1890: 89). When the first issue comes out, March feels free to admire it, since he has the sense that "he had not voluntarily put it all together; . . . it had largely put itself together" (Howells, 1890: 170). In the new magazines of the 1890s, however, editors moved from a supine to an upright posture: Frank Munsey, for example, editor and publisher of *Munsey's*, who prided himself on his wide-awake entrepreneurship, wrote his column from the "Publisher's Desk." By the mid-1890s, Munsey claimed over half a million in circulation, more than *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *Century*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* combined (Mott, 1957: 611).

The new editors actively solicited and commissioned articles and stories, and shaped the magazine. The two different editorial styles created very different author–publisher relationships, while the burgeoning market made paying literary careers possible for many more writers. Elite magazines and others that preceded the ten-cent revolution were also published for commercial ends; they simply accomplished them differently.

Books and Magazines

The major mid-nineteenth-century magazines were closely tied to book publishers, who often regarded them as ancillary to their book business, or as Fletcher Harper of Harper Brothers explained, he'd seen it initially in 1850 as "a tender to our business" as book publishers, though *Harper's Monthly* outgrew that role (Mott, 1938: 383). Such magazines served as places where new authors were sampled by the public, and where the publisher could test public reaction to a writer's work before bringing out a collection or novel by that writer. The magazine end of the business also ensured that the

book publisher's books were reviewed. By 1870, almost all novelists with a reputation sold their work to periodicals first, before book publication (Charvat, 1968: 309).

Publication of a book by Harper & Brothers in the 1800s marked it as part of a "powerful, extended cultural apparatus," June Howard notes in her study contextualizing a collaborative novel published in *Harper's Bazar* (Howard, 2001: 58). Harper Brothers' power in late nineteenth-century public life was in part derived from its several magazines. *Harper's Monthly* was an immediate and unprecedented success, with 50,000 subscribers six months after its founding in 1850 (Mott, 1938: 391). In an era when Americans were often fiercely allied to their specific religious denominations, and many publications had denominational or political affiliations, *Harper's* sought to be inclusive, albeit unoriginal, reprinting mostly pirated fiction from England, along with reprinted essays on science, travel, and biography. Its editor wrote in 1902 that from the beginning, it "excluded partisan politics and all subjects upon which readers were divided on sectarian lines in religious thought and feeling"; it eventually steered away from "timely" material as well (Howard, 2001: 63). The Harpers' strategy was to diversify their holdings and supply something to please every need of the middle-class family: timely matter found a place in *Harper's Weekly*, founded in 1857, which offered short articles on current affairs, and did cover politics, yoking that interest to the illustrations it became known for, with engravings during the Civil War based on the reportorial drawings of Winslow Homer and others, and later with Thomas Nast's scathing caricatures of Tammany Hall politicians. It also published fiction – much of it British. Harpers sent out another branch with a weekly fashion magazine started in 1867, *Harper's Bazar* (named after a German fashion weekly with that spelling); visually similar to *Harper's Weekly*, again containing English serials, illustrations, but with fashions instead of politics. *Harper's Young People*, begun in 1869, was another weekly, more newspaper-like than the imposingly book-like *St. Nicholas*. June Howard points to the idea of family circulating through the Harper enterprises – the band of brothers producing something for the whole family, "soliciting the purchasing power of men, women, and children separately, yet uniting them through their complementary participation in cultural consumption" (Howard 2001: 73).

Magazines for less elite readers often offered something for everyone in the family *within* one publication, so story papers and mail order magazines contained housekeeping advice departments and children's corners. Even when groups of readers seemed to be excluded by a magazine's editorial stance or even its title, as in the case of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, the magazines were often read more widely. Children might first pick up the *Ladies' Home Journal* to read a story, a year later begin pursuing the young people's advice columns, and go on to design their adult homes with the aid of its house plans, and console and uplift themselves with its reprints of sermons. Edward Bok, the *Journal's* long-time editor, was particularly pleased to hear U.S. soldiers requesting his magazine during World War I. Although his target audience was women, he considered men a more prestigious readership.

The repeated presence of an established writer in a magazine also helped to publicize that writer's books, especially when they were collections of stories or essays that had

appeared in that company's magazines. Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman's career provides an example of this pattern. Her first publications were children's poems in *Wide Awake* and *St. Nicholas*. Orphaned, she supported herself by writing, and continued producing works of types that had already proved successful sellers after she also started publishing stories for adults in *Harper's Bazar*, Harper's fashion magazine, and soon in *Harper's Monthly* as well. Lothrop's, publishers of *Wide Awake*, almost immediately began including her in collections of best poems for children, and within a short span brought out three collections of her work for children; in the first decade of her writing career, Harper Brothers brought out two collections of her stories for adults as well. Harper's ownership of a children's magazine, *Harper's Young People*, as well as the weekly, monthly, and fashion magazine, meant that they offered one or another venue for most work she might produce, and as she became more successful she published more exclusively with Harper periodicals. The firm therefore had a greater interest in publishing and promoting her stories and novels in book form. Continuing to publish with other firms, on the other hand, gave her more information about the market and more clout. The fact that in 1891 she was paid \$20 per thousand words by *Youth's Companion* gave her a bargaining chip to use in negotiating with a rival publication which offered her less (Freeman, 1985).

The division of literature through Harper's publications tells something of how works and the magazines were regarded in their time. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was serialized in *Harper's Bazar* in 1891, perhaps because the daring subject matter seemed congruent with a magazine that promised its readers to keep them current in matters of fashion and taste. At least two *Harper's Bazar* editors, Mary Louise Booth in the nineteenth century and Elizabeth Jordan in the early twentieth, took advantage of the fashion magazine's mandate to be up to date to promote unconventional political ideas as well. William Dean Howells's stories, novels, and essays appeared often in *Harper's Monthly*, where he long occupied the monthly column "Editor's Easy Chair," but *A Hazard of New Fortunes* was published by *Harper's Weekly* perhaps because it was topical, and much concerned with the events and commerce of the day.

The dominance of magazines connected to book publishers essentially ended by the early twentieth century, with the rise of the more directly commercial slick magazines. But some small press magazines retained something of this role, with journals like *The Chap-Book* of the 1890s or later Grove Press's *Evergreen Review* (1957–73) acting as advertisements themselves: as the flagship journals of book publishers, they excerpted and promoted their press's authors, allowing readers to sample avant-garde works.

Elite and Popular Publishing

Beyond the elite "class monthlies," literature had other periodical outlets. Before periodicals achieved substantial national distribution, the works that appeared in them went roaming beyond their pages through what were known as "exchanges" – the practice of one periodical clipping and reprinting material from another, with or without credit. Such activity could serve as a spontaneous, decentralized index to

the popularity of a writer's work. So in the autobiographical novel by Fanny Fern – pseudonym of Sara Willis Parton – *Ruth Hall*, the indication that Ruth is achieving acclaim as a writer is in the number of her pieces that are “scissored” and copied into exchanges: “A good sign for you Mrs. Hall; a good test of your popularity,” her publisher tells her. And Ruth's brother, the spoiler, editor of another periodical, modeled after Parton's brother, the prolific magazine editor, gift book compiler, and writer N.P. Willis, instructs his staff not to copy his sister's work, so as not to give her further publicity. (Magazine and publishing work could be a family legacy even in families less harmonious and cooperative than the Harpers – the father of these acrimonious magazinists was the editor of *Youth's Companion*, Nathaniel Willis.)

In the mid-nineteenth century the distinction between magazine and newspaper or story paper was not a sharp one. Fanny Fern's work was published in *The New York Ledger*, a weekly which looked like a newspaper and sold for six cents. It contained little news, however, but rather entertainment for the entire family: sketches like Fanny Fern's, serialized stories, poems, humor, fashion, current events, and at least one large illustration per issue. Story paper circulations were higher than any magazines of the period: by 1870, Robert Bonner's *New York Ledger* claimed 377,000 readers. Many story papers like the *Ledger* and *Saturday Night*, from Philadelphia, lasted into the 1890s. The new ten-cent magazines and the new crammed Sunday editions of newspapers displaced them. Fanny Fern was hired to write for *The Ledger* at \$100 a column, an extraordinary sum. Bonner paid her and other famous writers to write exclusively for his paper, and then advertised these agreements in his own paper and elsewhere. *The Ledger* also “puffed” Fanny Fern often within the paper, and she reciprocated by promoting Bonner and *The Ledger*, and wrote more generally about the benefits of newspaper reading (Pettingill, 1996). Such circles of mutual promotion perhaps gave readers the sense that the community of readers they had joined in buying this paper was a friendly and familial one.

The newspaper form allowed for the use of newer printing technologies like electrotyping. *The Ledger* presented the weekly newspaper format as progressive, and its success a deserved victory over books. Book sales were down, according to *The Ledger* because of the spread of “superior family and daily newspapers and magazines . . . What chance does a book . . . stand alongside of such a vigorous, healthy, rushing tide of news, history, romance, literature, and pictorial embellishment?” (Pettingill, 1996: 78).

The story papers were largely displaced by Sunday editions of newspapers, which offered even greater bargains in reading matter. They burgeoned from 8 pages in the early 1880s to 48 or more pages for five cents, full of features and stories signed by well-known authors as well as news, keyed to working people's only day off.

But some writers were not content to remain in the story papers, especially if they sought the cultural validation that came with publication in the elite magazines. There was often a tension between the cultural capital or prestige of publishing in the elite magazines and making a living as a writer, since the elite magazines were not the highest-paying and reached fewer readers. The career of Charles Chesnutt, who was more successful in publishing in the prestigious publications than other

turn-of-the-century African-American writers, illustrates both benefits and pitfalls of this approach.

Chesnutt first published short pieces in the humor weekly *Puck* and the story papers *Tid-Bits* and *Family Fiction*, and then had work syndicated by S.S. McClure's newspaper syndicate, which sent work out to subscribing papers; all of these reached sizable audiences. In 1887, *The Atlantic Monthly* published his "The Goophered Grapevine" (McElrath and Leitz, 1997). Despite its circulation of only 12,500 at this point, *Atlantic Monthly* still represented prestige and ties to the old center of literary publishing, Boston, perhaps especially important to a writer living in Cleveland, far from acknowledged centers of cultural production. Although he wanted to make a living as a writer – and a good living, one that would raise his children to a higher place in the world – pursuing prestigious publications evidently seemed a surer route to that end.

Chesnutt's earliest publications in *The Atlantic Monthly* were his Uncle Julius stories, such as "Po' Sandy," and "Dave's Neckliss," which superficially resemble Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories and other quasi-folk tales from the black South glorifying plantation life "befo' de waw." Chesnutt's stories instead subtly entertain the white readers, represented within the story by John, the white narrator of the frame story, and his wife, who are new to the South. In each, they listen to a story told by black Uncle Julius McAdoo, who through the subterfuges of his storytelling, brings about a change of plans in John, and causes both John and his wife, and through them the white readers, to see black life and history more sympathetically. Black life was largely ignored by the magazines in this period – Richard Ohmann's sampling of about a hundred magazine stories from the 1890s found that black people "figured only as minor characters, servants usually, adjuncts to white people's affairs, denied the power to act independently, and thus utterly unthreatening" (Ohmann, 1996: 229). But plantation scenes that glamorized the antebellum south were stock-in-trade in the magazines.

Chesnutt believed that his African-Americanness would make his work more, rather than less, attractive to magazines because it presumably indicated more authentic access to and knowledge of people he wrote about, though he had spent most of his life in the North. In introducing himself to the popular white writer George Washington Cable, who wrote more critically of this plantation world, Chesnutt wrote, "I am under the impression that a colored writer of literature is something that editors and the public would be glad to recognize and encourage" (McElrath and Leitz, 1997: 29). But the magazines were more interested in not challenging their readers too strongly, and he was less successful in either reaching other elite publications, or in publishing work that spoke more directly, outside of the familiar plantation framework. Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century*, rejected his essay "The Negro's Answer to the Negro Question" in 1889, calling it "so timely and so political – in fact so partisan" that they could not accept it (McElrath and Leitz, 1997: 20).

"Partisan" might be read as meaning "likely to antagonize Southern readers." *The Century* made a specialty of rewriting the Civil War in the 1880s, first with a series of history pieces, and then with numerous articles and stories. In 1890, Gilder celebrated the increasing numbers of southern writers as making northern periodicals "much

more national." He exulted, "It is well for the nation to hear in poem and story all that the South burns to tell of her romance, her heroes, her landscapes; yes of her lost cause." But editors did not see African-American writers as likely to make the magazines "more national."

Although Chesnutt's plantation stories no longer held his interest, they were what editors most wanted from him. *Atlantic Monthly* was owned by Houghton Mifflin, which was willing to publish a book of them, if he would produce more, and did. But as Chesnutt tried to write and publish more about the black middle class, he met with further editorial resistance. Gilder rejected a version of a story about a mulatto woman who passes for white, which later became Chesnutt's novel *The House Behind the Cedars*, complaining that the story was amorphous and the characters lacked the "spontaneous, imaginative life" which he associated with stories of black life. Chesnutt's commentary on this rejection took sharp notice of the demands of the magazines. Running with the assumption that Gilder means that mulattoes are amorphous, he wrote to Cable,

I fear there is too much of this sentiment to make mulattoes good magazine characters, and I notice that all of the good negroes (excepting your own creations) whose virtues have been given to the world through the columns of *The Century*, have been blacks, full-blooded, and their chief virtues have been their dog-like fidelity and devotion to their old masters.

(McElrath and Leitz, 1997: 65)

Nonetheless, Chesnutt revised the story based on Gilder's suggestions, though his revision did not bring him publication in *The Century*.

While Chesnutt's contacts with the elite magazines were hardly an unqualified success, they built up notice of his work when his books appeared. They also allowed him access to a literary community: he introduced himself to and developed correspondences with both Cable and another white writer who focused on the iniquities of the post-Reconstruction South, Albion Tourgée, and through them received advice and a larger circle of contacts that enabled him to publicize his books more broadly.

Entree into the literary world and contact with other writers was a significant benefit for other writers, like Mary Wilkins Freeman, as well, whose publications brought her new professional friends and editors who could offer criticism, recognition, and advice on where and how to publish. As the magazine world grew more complex and varied over the decades following the 1880s, such advice more often came from literary agents, or from magazines like *The Writer*, which began in 1887, suggesting that the magazine field had grown so dense by then that even amateurs needed a guide.

Serialization

Current scholarship in publishing history has recognized ways that a publication venue changes the text itself, even if the words are the same. The expectations of a reader

encountering a story in a beautifully produced slick magazine surrounded by ads in color showing fashionable men in Arrow shirt collars, worn by managers in offices, versus publication in a pulp magazine on cheap paper with crudely reproduced line drawings surrounded by ads for overalls, might be very different, even if the story is the same. Publication in a magazine, especially one concerned with current events, suggests timeliness, and implies that the story is tied to the happenings of the moment, while book publication can cushion the story from its moment of production and muffle the clamor of the times. Sometimes the differences in experience are obvious: waiting each month for another installment of a serial novel and reading it surrounded by ads and other serials, stories, and articles, with poems filling out the columns, is distinct from reading the novel bound in its own covers. Retrospective attention to that process of serialization opens up new understandings of a text and its readers.

Harper's Monthly led the trend toward magazine serialization of novels, beginning in 1850, with pirated British works. Soon, in other venues, US works appeared in installments as well. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was first serialized in a weekly newspaper, the abolitionist *National Era*, in 1851–2. In some ways, a weekly was better suited to serialization of a long novel and reached a larger circulation than many magazines of the time. Stowe had initially planned her work as a short series of sketches, and did not hand in a completed manuscript before beginning publication, but rather wrote as the story appeared for nearly a year. Serialization sharpened the sense that her novel belonged to the time; it built the circulation of *The National Era*, and built substantial interest in the book publication that quickly followed, which along with its publisher's innovative publicity methods, helped make it a best-seller.

By the early twentieth century, although arrangements were generally more regularized and magazines planned their output in advance, the draw of a big name was such that writers with a reputation for dependability often sold serial rights to a magazine on the basis of a synopsis and a manuscript only one-quarter completed. With such an arrangement, the manuscript might be still unfinished while the first chapters were already appearing in the magazine. Serialization favored certain narrative structures and made others undesirable. Flashback sequences, for example, could baffle readers who had access to only one installment at a time.

Monthly magazines serialized long novels, too, though late nineteenth-century magazines sometimes found reader and editorial staff's enthusiasm flagging part way through a long work. An editor at *The Century*, where James's *The Bostonians* was serialized, reports banter at the office to the effect that only James and his copyeditor were reading the novel. James was an acquired taste, and *Century* readers had not acquired it, he explains (Tooker, 1923: 227–8). Though some publishers worried that serialization would cut into book sales, prevailing wisdom held that readers would still prefer to sit down with the book version to read it straight through, though the serialization would pique interest. Even the publication of entire novels in a single issue, a practice at *Lippincott's* magazine in the 1880s, seems not to have hindered sales of its 1880s best-seller, Amelie Rives's *The Quick or the Dead*. Some story papers preferred to serialize and re-serialize the same novel, rather than sell the rights for book publication, believing

that a popular work like E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* was worth more to them in bringing in new or repeat readers of the work in newspaper form. Perhaps the small percentage of the population who bought new novels considered magazine serials beneath them, anyway. Henry James's *The Bostonians* includes an exchange between the overly trendy Matthias Pardon, a magazine writer, and Olive Chancellor.

He asked her if she were following any of the current 'Serials' in the magazines. On her telling him that she never followed anything of that sort, he undertook a defence of the serial system, which she presently reminded him that she had not attacked.

Henry James's sneer-quotes insinuate that there is something not quite correct about such reading.

Reading *The Bostonians* as it first appeared, serialized in *The Century* alongside William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, brings them into sharper comparison as satiric works about Boston society and its interplay of insiders and outsiders. (The presence of sections of *Huckleberry Finn* – not characterized as chapters of a novel – in the same issues sharpens the sense of the preciousness of Boston standards still further.) The appearance of both in what subscribers were well aware was a New York-based magazine, at a time when New York was displacing Boston as a magazine publishing center, perhaps gave the satiric attack on Boston more edge. Basil Ransom, *The Bostonians*' southern character who travels north and marries a northern woman, appears to comment on the trope of the tired northern businessman who goes south to rest, is seduced by relaxed southern life, and marries a southern woman – a staple of the plantation fiction that glutted *The Century*, at a time when it sought to increase southern readership. But since authors typically did not hand in completed manuscripts for serialization, rather working ahead of the installments, the orientation of editorial decision-making can be harder to discern.

The Twentieth-Century Market

Mass circulation magazines of the early to mid-twentieth century offered authors significant financial rewards, and writers often made far more from magazine publication than from book royalties. F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, made \$225,784 for his magazine fiction between 1919 and 1936, but only \$66,588 for book publication of his novels. Theodore Dreiser, though the author of five novels by the early 1920s, depended on magazine work for a living (West, 1988: 107). William Faulkner, Zona Gale, and Edith Wharton also made frequent appearances in the slicks.

The "slicks," as the shiny-paper, mass market magazines like *Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Women's Home Companion*, *Pictorial Weekly*, *Collier's*, *The Delineator*, and others were called in distinction to "pulp" – cheaply produced magazines on wood-pulp paper, filled with sensational or genre fiction – or the literary quarterlies with small circulations, exacted a toll for this high payment. They often rejected

fiction that didn't fit their formulas, even if it came from their favorite authors. Some writers, like Booth Tarkington, were willing to adapt and edit out such offending aspects of their works as unhappy endings or political references, to gain access to the *Saturday Evening Post* pay scale. Perhaps his works naturally fit the formula, characterized by James West as one with a hero who "used his inborn resourcefulness to overcome difficulties and to achieve high standing in business and fulfillment in love" (West, 1988: 105). Ernest Hemingway was willing to bow to *Scribner's Magazine's* request to delete various words and lines judged "too strong" from *A Farewell to Arms* (West, 1988: 109). Slick magazines were likely to exclude fiction with unmarried cohabiting couples, suicide, pregnant bodies, and to make other cuts for space reasons. Book publishers were usually more flexible, so readers of the period might have encountered very different works under the same title, depending on where they read them.

Requirements of the magazine strongly influenced the publications. The shift from the genteel editing practices common up till the 1880s to the more business-oriented model that came to prevail, and which was more hospitable to the needs of advertisers, changed conditions for writers as well. They were likely to be better paid by the newer magazines – *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Harper's Bazar* and then the ten-cent middle-class magazines like *McClure's* – but these magazines created a new relationship with authors as well as readers. Rather than reading and selecting from work that arrived unsolicited, "over the transom," the new editors commissioned articles and stories on particular topics or with particular angles. They imposed length requirements for stories, articles, and serial installments, rather than accommodating the material that came in, and authors endeavored to write to suit. This does not mean that they therefore produced lesser work, but rather that a writer's production of, for example, very short stories might mark his or her recognition of a market for them, rather than a deep desire to work in that specific form.

But even writers who began their careers before the advent of the slicks, and who were popular and prolific, like Mary Wilkins Freeman, complained of the effect of commercial pressure on their work. "Most of my own work is not really the kind I myself like. I want more symbolism, more mysticism. I left that out, because it struck me people did not want it, and I was forced to consider selling qualities," Freeman wrote to anthology editor Frederick Lewis Pattee in 1919 (Freeman, 1985).

Edith Wharton was one writer who benefitted greatly from the new, high-circulation magazines. Her career straddled two distinct periods in publishing – that of the "gentleman publisher" and the more overtly commercial orientation in force in the twentieth century. She began her professional writing career in 1889 by sending out one poem each to three of the four "class" magazines: *Harper's*, *The Century*, and *Scribner's*. All three were accepted, but the encouraging letter from *Scribner's* helped launch a publishing relationship with that firm that mixed the old-style relationship of author with gentleman publisher and the newer more businesslike model. Under the older system, the publisher demonstrated faith in an author by publishing him or her before that author had built an audience; the author in turn accepted lower

royalties and stayed loyal to that publishing house after other options opened up, and didn't inquire closely into the possibility that other publishers might be willing to pay considerably more. *Scribner's* accepted her early short stories, and its editor, Edward Burlingame, urged her to collect them into a book. Though she held back from fulfilling that request, Scribner's book publisher accepted her first book, the collaborative nonfiction *The Decoration of Houses*, which sold slowly.

Her first short story collection, *The Greater Inclination*, met with modest success and an offer of British publication, and inspired Wharton to ask for a higher royalty on her next book, as she continued to publish stories in *Scribner's* and elsewhere. Part way through her work on *The House of Mirth*, Burlingame solicited it for serialization in the magazine. She credited the pressure to produce regularly, writing the ending when the earlier part of the novel had already appeared, with giving her self-confidence and discipline (Madison, 1974: 133–4). Nonetheless, she asked for a high fee for serialization, requested higher royalties based on sales (20 percent after the first 10,000) and got a considerable sum when sales soon exceeded 100,000. Such success gave her more bargaining power, and she distributed her work to other book publishers, and had it serialized in newer, higher-paying magazines not tied to book publishers – e.g., *Pictorial Review*, *Redbook* – and eventually phased out *Scribner's* and Scribner's book publishers.

Pictorial Review, a popular women's magazine with a circulation in its prime of 2.5 million, serialized *The Age of Innocence*, for which Wharton received \$18,000 in 1920, and which she again finished while earlier chapters were already in print. They serialized *Glimpses of the Moon*, and *The Mother's Recompense*, both of which became best-sellers in book form. Its editor, Arthur Vance, held bidding wars with rival magazines that drove her fees still higher (Thornton, 1998: 160). While she had balked in the 1910s at publishing in William Randolph Hearst's *Cosmopolitan*, accepting a lower fee for one work to place it in *Scribner's*, publication in *Pictorial Review* did not raise her hackles.

Some literary critics have responded to her choice to publish in popular, high-paying magazines by assuming that she wrote down to the mass audience, and relaxed her literary standards, while others see her in this period more closely engaging with issues of the day, of sharper interest to buyers of a magazine that emphasized timeliness, and which promoted her work in terms familiar to fashion. *Pictorial Review's* October 1924, cover, for example, featured an illustration of a vamping blonde by a leading illustrator of the time, Earl Christy, with the caption "The Fiction Event of the Year. A New Novel – 'The Mother's Recompense' by Edith Wharton." The December issue advertised it in similar time- and style-conscious terms, as "The Serial Sensation of the Year – Everyone's Talking About It." Wharton's cachet as an insider in the world of wealth and privilege was a selling point when *Pictorial Review* promoted the book to its readers, who were told that "Mrs. Wharton . . . knows the people whom she writes about – because she has lived among them. They are her people" (Thornton, 1998: 215–16). The presence of Wharton novels, often hostile to new modes of youth culture and their accompanying styles, in a magazine that promoted those styles sometimes made for tension between the magazine's illustrations, advertising, and overall orientation

and Wharton's judgments. When a flapper character who is the target of Wharton's critically satiric eye is illustrated as an American beauty, or the synopses of preceding installments, written by the editorial staff, reframe and soften the narrative to create a buffer between Wharton's satire and the magazine reader, the magazine in effect rebuts the critique, and assures the reader that she can have access to "the people [Wharton] writes about" without meeting the scorn with which they – or Wharton – might greet her, as a fashion-conscious flapper. And yet Wharton's endorsement of a middle-aged woman's sexuality was still available to readers.

Magazines valued an author's steady productivity; in the twentieth century they increasingly valued authors who could create a consistent product – something recognizable as a Fitzgerald story, or a Faulkner story containing the character Snopes. Such writers created a kind of reliable brand name that readers could recognize and buy a magazine for, or subscribe in confidence that they would be regularly supplied with a new serving of work that had already appealed to them. When writers produced something that did not fit that conception, editors might turn unrecaptive.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, large-circulation magazines had been chiefly displaced by television as an advertising medium, and therefore as a commercial proposition. Few published fiction, and most magazine literary publication had moved to the small press literary magazines, often subsidized by universities, and charging high subscription prices, or to the equivalent of "slicks," that reached a particular, well-defined, and often well-heeled readership, like *The New Yorker*, *Redbook*, and the contemporary version of *Cosmopolitan*.

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Realism and Victorian Protestantism in African-American Literature

Phillip M. Richards

This chapter forms part of a larger analysis which argues African-American literature displays a cultural continuity between traditional Protestant piety and a tentative romanticism, tested by realism. This tradition makes up a literary line such as that discerned by Perry Miller between Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Within this tradition Puritan forms of autobiography, mediation, piety, redemptive history, and social organization appear first in the early poems of Phillis Wheatly, the sermons of Jupiter Hammon, and the essays of Ann Plato only to be later transformed into their romantic analogues in the 1845 Frederick Douglass *Narrative*, the *Journals* of Charlotte Forten Grimké, as well as the fiction of Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, and Charles Chesnutt. This transformation from piety to romanticism plays an important role in how one kind of African-American author – grounded in Victorian Protestant tradition – faces the literary milieu produced by late nineteenth-century American realism.

At the heart of the black encounter with realism is a deep anxiety over the intellectual legitimacy of religious forms as well as their secularized analogues in the writing of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson. Not only an intellectual and political elite experienced this anxiety in its writing, but also the middle-class clergy who saw themselves as the mainstay of the growing black nineteenth-century middle class.

When I refer to Protestant forms of religion I refer primarily to the set of Calvinist doctrines extending from original sin to the gathering of the elect to the perseverance of the saints. These doctrines include also the trinity, divinity of Christ, the atonement, and justification by faith. I want to understand these religious doctrines within the context of a primary religious form of what M.H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism* calls the “Circuitous Journey.” Here Abrams shows the transformation of this narrative from early Christianity to English romantic poetry. This story, as I take it, includes both narratives of personal and historical redemption – each of which follows an alienation from a paradise that in a spiraling journey is recovered in a higher spiritual.

My use of this formulation is not new. It has largely been assumed by Americanists before and after Abrams, including Perry Miller, as well as by students of Emerson such as Barbara Packer. It is safe to say that most Americanists take for granted a continuity of Protestant piety to American romanticism although a broad synoptic study of American romanticism such as *Natural Supernaturalism* has not emerged. This transformation, I argue, is also central to African-American literature. Such pietistic forms appear in the earliest sermons, religious poems, and narratives of spiritual experience by blacks. They begin to take secularized forms in the early constitutions of black benevolent groups, the preaching of early nineteenth-century preachers, and the poetry of later figures such as Frances Harper.

The narrative of personal religious experience plays a particular role as black writers expound the theme of leadership, a theme which emerges in the black writing of the 1850s and 1860s. Drawing on the subjects of the slave narratives and possibly characters from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, writers such as Martin Delaney and Frederick Douglass show young slaves living in comfortable domestic settings estranged from the harsh social, political, and economic realities of slavery. In the course of their lives, heroic figures such as Eliza Shelby, George Harris, Blake, Frederick Douglass, and Linda Brent attempt to recreate – in another space and time – the familial and social unity which they knew at the beginning of their experience. This pattern is an echo of the pattern of fall and recuperation which romanticism, according to Abrams, secularizes from both Christianity and neo-Platonism. Within the context of these African-American fictions – which display the literary characteristics of sentimental fiction – this pattern suggests the psychology of the favored slave whose destiny has been propelled by a childhood interracial happiness – a pattern apparent from the early narratives of Equiano and others. This pattern suggests a psychological determinism that in many ways repeats a providential determinism that also drives the narrative of conversion. This is to say that the early novelized slave narratives have within them a sense of a divine causality that moves the heroic romantic black figure through the difficulties he or she later faces in a slave's life.

In the unfinished serialized novel *Blake*, Delaney presents Blake, an articulate privileged slave who has served his master well. Upon losing his wife and his freedom, Blake goes on to become a heroic, redemptive figure who saves first himself and then returns back to the plantation to lead his fellow slaves to freedom. In the course of the early narrative, Blake is transformed from a contented, comfortable bondsman to a fierce opponent of slavery – once he is awakened to the true nature of his relationship to the white master class of the South. A similar pattern appears in Douglass's 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom* in which Douglass is raised amidst the paternalistic attentions of the Auld family only later to enter the life of the field hand on Covey's farm. Although Douglass has earlier been awakened to his sense of providential destiny, the experience of a slave at Covey's initiates him in the role of freedom fighter first for himself and then for other slaves.

Similarly, the figure Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* begins her life in a permissive paternalistic bondage that allows her access to her mother and father.

After the death of her mistress, Linda Brent is given as a slave to the small daughter of the earlier mistress's sister. The young Linda Brent, only partly protected by a stalwart grandmother, falls victim to the head of Brent's new household, the evil Mr. Flint. In the course of the narrative, Jacobs tells the tale of Brent's attempt to recover her autonomy through marriage to a white man, Mr. Sands, by whom she has children, and eventually by her own escape from the South. Linda Brent emerges as a heroic figure on a par with the Douglass of the 1855 autobiography and Delaney's *Blake*. A literate woman, she teaches aspiring slaves to write. She seeks moreover to recover for her children the kind of loving home where she had been reared by a caring mother, father, and grandmother. Linda Brent in a sense attempts to reproduce in the lives of her children the supportive domestic paradise that she knew in childhood before the death of her white mistress.

Accompanying the determinism that drives the romantic heroines of these novels is the writers' newly optimistic vision of the black folk's potential for uplift and improvement. This vision illuminates two aspects of the folk. On the one hand, in works such as Douglass's 1855 autobiography and Delaney's *Blake* they show the capacity to be led politically and socially by the black romantic hero. Blake is educated politically through his encounter with the struggles of previous blacks. His black fellows provide economic support for him, while also helping him to escape. And they follow him faithfully as he leads them to freedom. Furthermore, the folk reveal themselves to be a repository of knowledge and experience about life within the plantation. The Douglass of the 1855 autobiography learns from the folk community on the Auld plantation and discovers a critique of slavery in the sly songs he hears as a field hand at Covey's. The freedman, Sandy, who appears in the 1845 narrative as a dupe of the whites emerges in *My Bondage and My Freedom* as the possessor of a mystical knowledge that can challenge white supremacy. Sandy cogently tells the young Douglass escaping from Covey that the slave's formal learning has not helped him overcome his condition. Similarly, in Jacobs's *Incidents* the slaves reject the preaching of a proslavery preacher, show wit in deceiving their masters, and dramatize a capacity for loving community. Linda Brent teaches a particularly ambitious old slave to learn to read. Within the context of these characters, the black folk appear to be moving towards a fulfillment of their own, a movement that parallels the providentially or spiritually determined movement of the black romantic hero.

Within the context of the Protestant tradition that runs through nineteenth-century African-American culture, the early novels of the 1850s form a bridge joining earlier Christian traditions of conversion, community, and providence to the redeemed black communities of marriages in novels such as *Iola Leroy*, *Contending Forces*, *Four Girls at Cottage City*, and *Megda*. Heroic black women alienated from happy, interracial Christian families in the antebellum world reconstitute black community at the end of their fictional experience. Not surprisingly, the vehicle for these artistic forms is a variation of the sentimental-evangelical novel that borrows the psychology of romanticism. And these narratives are driven by the plot structure of a secular romantic providence transplanted from an earlier Christian redemptive history.

The romantic continuity, however, depends ultimately on a world view whose elements derive from Calvinist Protestant theology. In late nineteenth-century African-American middle-class culture the providential vision of corporate and individual life was held in place by such a middle-class Christianity. This was the theology of original sin, the trinity, the divinity of Christ, justification by faith, God's sovereignty, and the perseverance of the saints. Implicitly this theology demanded a traditional reading of Biblical narrative that linked Old Testament to New Testament through typological lines which found their fulfillment in Christ as the second Adam, the great messiah, the man of sorrows prophesied by Isaiah. The plots of the books that I described are typological structures in which Old Testament dicta, doctrines, actions, and characters prefigure – through Christ – their New Testament counterparts.

The hopeful outlook toward uplift characterizing mainline nineteenth-century sentimental black novels is – much more than the emerging realism of writers such as Charles Chesnutt – the main continuity of black Victorian culture. Any understanding of African-American realism must be understood in the context of a pervasive Victorian-Protestant Romanticism that is deeply threatened by the intellectual dynamics of realism. In particular, realism in America sought to provide a slice-of-life vision of the world. Realism grounded the character, psychology, authorial point of view, and ethical perspective in a fictional world that was governed not by divine providence but rather by the materialist workings of politics, economics, biology, and society. A number of consequences follow from this. Realistic portrayals set forth secularized motivations and forces as shaping plot and characterization. The fate of literary characters was not grounded in divine providence or a related optimism but rather in the constraints of material and social realities. Within this context, morality found its basis not in scriptural dicta or ethics but rather in principles that could be complicated by particular social, political, and ethical situations. Morality itself assumed a relativistic character in the realistic work. And earlier restrictions against the close examination of “obscene,” “abnormal,” or “pornographic” sides of life fell by the way. The tragic acceptance of material realities in life also cut against the grain of many of the melodramatic literary conventions earlier associated with the sentimental novel.

As a number of recent critics of nineteenth-century black women's fiction show, however, sentimentality and the celebration of the home had important social-political implications for late nineteenth-century African-American life. The reconstitution of the home in the lives of romantic heroines meant the establishment of domestic worlds in which the ethos of bourgeois life might be inculcated in new generations. The reconstitution of the sentimental home meant a reproduction of bourgeois society in a post-Reconstruction, Jim Crow, or northern ghetto world whose social, economic, and political forces undermined the discipline needed for black social action.

There is an important distinction between the sentimental late nineteenth-century women's novels and the more straightforwardly realistic fictions such as Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* or Paul Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods*. Both kinds of novels have a political thrust – either propounding uplift or protesting the social and

political conditions of the late nineteenth-century black world. However, to consider both styles of books together is to realize the way in which the social causality that defined realism ran against the grain of the Romantic-Victorian Protestant world view that sustained the providential optimism of uplift. More specifically, to attack the Protestant Calvinist theological world view that sustained uplift was to attack the possibility of a progressive black history that might transcend the social limitations posed by late nineteenth-century racist America. And one of the most characteristic aspects of the Protestant Victorian culture represented in texts such as the *AME Church Review* was an intense defense of traditional Protestant piety and conceptions of scriptural narrative. A deep anxiety about the loss of this legitimizing world view appears in both black writers' persistent defense and exposition of the Protestant world view and particularly in the ambivalent romanticism of black pre-modernist texts like *Up From Slavery*, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, and *The Souls of Black Folk*.

At the heart of the Puritan world view existed a belief, grounded in scripture, in a redemptive providence. Articles in the leading journal of black literary culture, the *AME Church Review*, propounded those scriptural doctrines that sustained this vision. Chief among them were the notion of a continuity between the Old and New Testament – a continuity that posited a single redemptive history joining the era of the Israelites and the early Christians through Christ. Within the context of this continuity, Christian blacks in the nineteenth century became the exponents of a long established Christian history. Secondly, the commands of Jesus and the New Testament prophets in this version of Scriptural history became echoes and fulfillments as opposed to reversals of Old Testament commandments.

The notion of a providential history grounded in biblical history, however, had long been under attack in Anglo-American Protestant culture. The higher criticism of late eighteenth-century Germany grounded Biblical writ in distinctive cultures, historical periods, and national settings – undermining the notion of a continuous redemptive history. Moreover, increasingly secular conceptions of history as a product of biological, economic, political, and social forces undermined a divine sovereignty aimed at the final gathering of the elect.

One of the responses to this attack on a redemptive history that sustained the social ethos of black Victorian Christianity appeared in sermons that identified divine providence with the progress of the race. At times, this secular-romantic myth described the present as a fall from an earlier unity with nature and the future as the fulfillment of the black race's destiny. However, black writers gave the future different nuances as they expounded this view. For some, the future became contingent. Black men had to strive mightily in conflict to reach their racial destiny. Some subtle thinkers such as Alexander Crummell sought to combine both elements of a history and existence grounded in struggle with the optimism of a providential destiny. Others sought to present biblical histories of the Israelites that had been purified for their providential fulfillment through Christian struggles. In both cases, the conflict with the material conditions of the present became in the thinking of Victorian Christians not an obstacle but a challenging means of achieving a redemptive destiny.

Implicit in the reworking of this providential notion of struggle, however, was a deep anxiety about the present. The sermons of the period speak directly of the attacks that blacks faced in the Jim Crow South as white southerners reacted against the Reconstruction period of liberalization. These attacks took the form of court rulings, mob attacks, segregation, and political oppression. These outrages directly called into question the optimistic view of history on which the social ethos of the black Victorian world view rested. And this questioning inevitably created the texture of deep anxiety which pervades even the most hopeful of the affirmations of a black providential destiny. The affirmations of a Christian-Romantic history, the Christian-Romantic leader, and the political destiny of the folk all represent mainstays against the anxieties faced by the popular black theological writers of the late nineteenth century. The issues concerning black political identity should be seen in this connection but also as means of questioning racial destiny in a perilous historical period. This inquiry, moreover, concerned the possibility of civic and social virtue needed for political action and social organization in what Rayford Logan called the “nadir” of African-American history.

The period's most acute intellectuals such as Booker T. Washington in *Up from Slavery*, W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, and James Weldon Johnson in the *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* struggle to understand the implications of these issues in the context of the Jim Crow era. They confronted the possibilities of black life shaped by a world of peonage labor, mob action, segregation, the formation of the ghetto, and political disenfranchisement. As the Great Migration began in the North, the segregated black inner-city worlds of New York, Philadelphia, and Cleveland emerged. Finally, both the urban South and North saw the emergence of a small black middle class capable of mounting symbolic political protests. This is the world of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee and Du Bois's Atlanta University – both of which created a new professional and middle class capable of leading black communities.

Du Bois and Washington, whatever their differences, addressed the question of the formation of a black intellectual leadership class in an age in which Frederick Douglass remained the paradigm of the black leader. The concept of the black leader shaped through literacy, New England-Protestant-tilted education and spiritual reflection links Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* to *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Up from Slavery*.

In their texts, these writers directly confront the issue of cultivating a civic virtue based on romantic optimism and providential hope among a people who face major dislocations amidst the rapidly modernizing Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century. These writers set forth the ways in which the folk might achieve their romantic potential amidst this society. These major literary figures seek to define how leaders might transcend the difficulties of the Jim Crow South and the forming ghetto in the North.

This problem is confronted directly by Booker T. Washington in his *Up from Slavery*. On the one hand, the narrator portrays himself as a Christian romantic hero, deeply influenced by New England Yankees such as Mrs. Ruffner, as well as by literacy, and white patronage. He represents in this respect a providential black figure destined for

greatness in the manner of Frederick Douglass, whose 1845 *Narrative* Washington often echoes. At the same time, Booker T. Washington is deeply aware of the persistence of racism in the Jim Crow South, an anti-black southern constituency, and the potential approval of northern white industrialists concerned with profits to be made in the South.

Thus, on the one hand, Washington casts himself as a figure of progress. And on the other hand, he attacks those political and social means by which blacks had sought equality in the Reconstruction period. He attacks the political orators, the "stump speakers" who vied for political office, sought to organize the black masses, and attempted to wield influence in both state and national legislatures. Washington also criticizes attempts by black intellectuals to advocate social equality with whites. And he minimizes the power of racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan then in the process of intimidating much of the black population. Washington's emphasis on the manual trades and practical usefulness similarly was meant as an appeal to the hard-nosed materialism of the northern industrialists whose patronage he sought for his school and political empire.

Although Washington plays the role of the providentially determined hero, he nevertheless maneuvers around a complex set of political realities. Booker T. Washington's mix of providential heroism and pragmatic politics led to the strategy of accommodationism that honored the imperatives of black leadership and the realities of white racism. He exhorts his black audiences to seek not only a rapprochement but also actual political cooperation with their white neighbors. Through his minstrel-like jokes, Washington ridiculed the pre-industrial habits of the rural black folk. Similarly, he ridiculed the southern folk ministry while assuring his middle-class black audience that the quality of black preachers was improving.

This blend of providential and pragmatic outlooks appears too in the mixture of genres that make up the book. *Up from Slavery* draws upon the providential romantic features of earlier black fiction as well as memoir, the highly realistic depiction of late nineteenth-century black social settings such as the rural black belt, the black college, the New England missionaries to the South, and the Gilded Age sphere of the white industrialist. On a literary level, the book moves between romantic optimism and a confrontation with the hard-nosed realities of its period. And this mixture contributes finally to an ironic yet hopeful, a parodic yet serious, literary texture that characterizes the work and Washington's sensibility as a whole.

Underlying *Up from Slavery* is a deep pessimism about the political conditions that make Washington's cynical double-dealing necessary. W.E.B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, presents an even more explicitly pessimistic attempt to measure the turn-of-the-century era by the standard of romantic Victorian idealism and Gilded Age hypocrisy. Du Bois incisively shows the debilitating effect of Jim Crow and ghetto realities upon those intellectuals who must shape a black world of culture.

Du Bois's debate with Washington boils down to a critique of the necessary irony with which the Wizard of Tuskegee made his way through the Jim Crow era and Gilded Age. At stake in this debate is not only the possibility of the vote, property

rights, and physical security but also the hope for a black leadership class in the democratic world, a class providing not only academic instruction but moral leadership. Significantly the strongest case to be made for Du Bois appears in his account of the city of Atlanta, Georgia, which presents both the corruption of the Gilded Age world and the ideals of the black Atlanta University. This black school has already created an idealistic black leadership class that has had a positive effect on the African-American South.

As a Victorian Protestant leader of the folk, Du Bois sees himself confronting the decline of the Black social and economic world stemming from Jim Crow segregation and the system of peonage dominating the world of sharecropping. Like Washington, Du Bois gives deeply realistic pictures of the debilitating social and political effects of life in the Black Belt. Similarly, he retraces the cynicism of the middle- and upper middle-class blacks to their social distance from upper-class white centers of culture. A sense of community between the racial elites might give the black upper classes a sense of belonging and a creative impulse from the society's sources of cultivation.

Jim Crow segregation and the world of sharecropping were for Du Bois part of the materialism which he saw in typically late nineteenth-century romantic fashion as part of the greed of the Gilded Age. Du Bois significantly also notes the decline of white gentility, courtesy and intelligence. This decline was particularly damaging for a black society grounded in a charismatic evangelical religion that had inspired hope during the Civil War. In the war's aftermath this piety only promoted the cynical hustling of the Jim Crow rural South and the rural ghetto. In particular, he notes the emergence of personality types that would reappear in James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*: the consistently dehumanized and violently outraged black, the hustler, and the black cynic. It is impossible not to recognize some of the characteristics of these figures in the voices of Booker T. Washington's ironic narrator.

The collapse of the society described so powerfully in the middle books of *The Souls of Black Folk* showed the *Sturm und Drang* of intellectual life with which the essay collection ends. The story of Alexander Crummel depicts, for example, a saintly Victorian Protestant black intellectual's struggles with the obstacles of segregation in American church life. The story "Of the Coming of John" shows the collapse of a member of the new generation of post-Reconstruction intellectuals under the pressures of the Jim Crow world to which John returns to a Wilberforce-like black college. Du Bois shows himself caught between the extremes of hope and despair as John mourns his sister's death and as Du Bois himself mourns the death of his infant son. This trauma represents Du Bois's own questioning of the usefulness of his work of uplift within the Jim Crow society.

Significantly, the author finds the possibility of new commitment to the future in the recovery of the folk spirituals of the past. Du Bois's musings on the songs that he first heard at his grandmother's knee represent a new source of romantic hope at the end of *Souls*. This source of romantic hope has, as Du Bois shows, been vindicated by the recent transcendentalist recovery of the black spirituals by figures such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Lucy McKim, and Charlotte Forten. The recovery of African

music allows Du Bois to assume again the role of a romantic culture hero who finds a spiritual possibility in the potential of the black folk.

The critic Houston Baker has observed that the turn-of-the-century period of Jim Crow represents an epoch of African-American modernism. The loss both of a conception of viable leadership and of civic community under the cultural pressures generated by the Jim Crow era resembled the traumatic cultural situation later experienced by white European and American intellectuals after World War I. The 1912 novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* applies realistic literary conventions of unreliable narration and sociological portrayal, as well as the conventions of sentimentality, the self-made man story, and the slave narrative in order to create a book that begins to initiate a modernist style in African-American literature. Johnson's book set forth a style increasingly prominent in such early twentieth-century African-American works as Jean Toomer's *Cane*.

The novel tells the story of the mulatto child of a father from a southern planter family and a mixed black woman. The child is raised by his mother in Connecticut where he slowly becomes aware of his racial identity as a black. The story follows the narrator's movement from Atlanta University to Florida where he works as a cigar stripper, to his days in New York as a gambler and musician, to Europe with a millionaire patron, back to America where he attempts to research black music in the South, and finally to his middle-aged life as a self-made businessman passing for white in New York City.

James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* makes use of motifs from the sentimental novel that have a strong affinity to the circuitous journey described by Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*. The main character moves from the loss of mother and father to the restoration of home; his development suggests the unfolding of the self in the creation of a self-made man and the artist. By the end of the book the narrator has acquired – despite the death of his wife – the domestic bliss of children, financial security, and a place within the social world. At the same time, Johnson draws upon the techniques of realism not only to document black society in Florida, New York, Washington DC, and Georgia but also to analyze the black middle-class, and rural folk worlds of the South as well as the bourgeois and lower class of the North. Against the background of this scrupulous documentation, Johnson shows that the main character's unfolding of musical sensitivity serves selfish ends, the seduction of a girlfriend, millionaire patrons, and finally a wife. In these seductions, the ex-colored man becomes like those black gigolos whom he disdains as a musician in New York. The narrator seeks to advance black progress – a little like Du Bois's narrator – through the recovery of black folk music. However, Johnson's ex-colored man flees the South and his project when he comes face-to-face with the reality of the lynch mob. He determines to pass for white, but admits only to letting the world take him for what it thinks he is. Finally, the ex-colored man at the novel's end claims to feel sympathy for the exponents of black political progress, but clearly rejects the life of difficulties which such progress demands.

Within the context of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, the Protestant Romantic myth of progress has become a self-delusion. Even a once idealistic

intellectual finds that he must live by his wits to make a comfortable life for himself as a black in the Gilded Age. The attempt at the romantic unfolding of black racial potential is undermined by Johnson's highly realistic account of the debilitating conditions of the Gilded Age, the formation of the ghetto, and the Jim Crow South. Within the novel, the tension between providential-romantic and realistic world views becomes the dialectic of the psychology nascent in Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* and full-blown in Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*.

The literary excellence of these books inheres in their capacity to explore the psychology and sociology of the ideological tensions of middle-class intellectual black life in a far more penetrating way than Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* and Francis Harper's *Iola Leroy*.

In the works of Washington, Du Bois, and Johnson the stances of irony, hope, cynicism, and heroism are seen not as distinctive postures but as elements of a complicated mind-set with which the most sophisticated intellectuals must cope. These authors paved the way for similar sophisticated psychologies in such works as Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Melvin Tolson's *Harlem Gallery*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In the conflict between realism and romantic Protestantism an important African-American psychology of existential choice is formed.

The Maturation of American Fictions

Gary Scharnhorst

In “The American Scholar,” his Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard in 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson famously announced that Americans have “listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe” and called for a new, distinctive, and indigenous national literature. Over the final 40 years of his career, the American editor, critic, and novelist W. D. Howells (1837–1920) turned the argument around. Most late nineteenth-century American writers, according to Howells, had failed to adapt to artistic developments in England and Europe, especially the evolution of a superior species of fiction and drama often labeled “realism.” Among the first shots in the so-called “realism war,” in effect a nineteenth-century controversy akin to the canon and culture wars of the late twentieth century, was Howells’s essay “Mr. Henry James, Jr.” (1882), as provocative in its way (if more neglected) as Emerson’s address had been 45 years earlier.

In the essay, written while he was living in Europe, Howells distinguished between an outdated and obsolete English romantic tradition epitomized by the works of Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray and an emerging realism practiced by such European and American novelists as George Eliot, Alphonse Daudet, Emile Zola, and particularly Henry James. “The art of fiction has, in fact, become a finer art in our day than it was with Dickens and Thackeray,” Howells insisted. “These great men are of the past – they and their methods and interests.” He objected in particular to the pathos and sentimentality of Dickens and to the “confidentiality” of Thackeray, his overt moralizing and authorial intrusions. To support his claims in defense of the “new school” of literary art, Howells developed an explicitly evolutionary model of artistic development. Romance is as inferior to realism as the trilobite is to the trout. This “new school,” “largely influenced by French fiction in form,” Howells concluded, finds “its chief exemplar in Mr. James . . . A novelist he is not, after the old fashion, or after any fashion but his own.” Howells was roundly ridiculed, especially in England, for his ostensible denunciation of Dickens and Thackeray and his valorization of James. Some months later, speaking in his own defense after his return to the US, however, he

explained to an interviewer that “There is a fashion in novels, as in everything else, and I simply called attention to the fact that in some respects the fashion had changed.”

James’s “Daisy Miller” (1879) and *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), both of them newly published when Howells’s essay first appeared, were in effect parodies of the sentimental romance popular on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the nineteenth century. In “Daisy Miller,” for example, James subverts the conventional plot of Love Triumphant by contrasting the social codes of the parvenu Daisy and the hopelessly prim and stiff-necked Winterbourne, and the nouvelle ends not with the reconciliation of the pair but with the unexpected death of the heroine. Or in *The Portrait*, published serially in the *Atlantic Monthly* during Howells’s tenure as its editor, the heroine Isabel Archer spurns the marriage proposals of noble Lord Warburton and rich and dashing Casper Goodwood, types of heroes suited to sentimental romance, to wed the fortune-hunting Gilbert Osmond, a thoroughly despicable collector of *objets d’art*. The novel ends ambiguously, with Isabel apparently returning to her husband and confinement in his gimcrack cabinet. But not necessarily so. As Howells noted, “There is no question . . . but [James] could tell the story of Isabel in ‘The Portrait of a Lady’ to the end, yet he does not tell it. We must agree, then, to take what seems a fragment instead of a whole, and to find, when we can, a name for this new kind of fiction.” Whatever else may be said of it, the “new novel” of the late nineteenth century betrayed an epistemological modesty that presages the uncertainties of the modern period.

Howells was also well known for the open-endedness or indeterminacy of his asymmetrical novels, for their resistance to closure, for his refusal to comfort his readers with the neat and pretty resolutions of plot common in romance but foreign to realism. The first significant American novel about divorce, *A Modern Instance* (1882), closes as the lawyer Atherton, a Howells spokesman, declares “Ah, I don’t know! I don’t know!” what to advise the man who loves a widowed divorcée. Howells’s novel *A Minister’s Charge* (1887) ends with the news that the hero and the girl he loves “will never be married.” Howells assures the reader “that the marriage which eventually took place was not that of Lemuel with Statira” and that whatever happens to them “is aside from the purpose of this story to tell.” In the final chapters of Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1889), modeled on the panoramic novels of the Russian realists Turgeneff and Tolstoi, his protagonist Basil March, also a Howells persona, flirts with a belief in hard determinism – that events are “forecast from the beginning of time” – when his shocked wife upbraids him: “This is fatalism!” March then weakly concedes “I don’t know what it all means, Isabel, though I believe it means good.” No happy ending this.

James, the so-called “master” of the novel during this period, deployed a type of psychological realism in a prolix and periphrastic style, with supersensual narrators or “centers of consciousness.” His essay “The Art of Fiction” (1884) is, among other things, a response to and an elaboration of Howells’s arguments for realism. Howells had called James’s method “character-painting,” and in his essay James argued that the novel should exude an “air of reality . . . The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life.” Central to his aesthetic were experiments in

point of view. Chapter 41 of the original version of *The Portrait of a Lady*, in which Isabel Archer muses on the condition of her marriage and her life alone by a fire late at night, a chapter that contains neither a reference to physical movement nor a word of dialogue, anticipates the modern stream-of-consciousness novels of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner. "The Turn of the Screw" (1898) tells a ghost story from the point of view of a psychosexually repressed narrator who hallucinates or imagines the ghosts. (Significantly, it was read as a literal ghost story until the vogue of Freud in the 1920s.) Particularly in some of the novels of his so-called "major phase," especially those he first dictated to an amanuensis before revising the dictation, James depicted such minimal physical activity that some critics joked that he "chewed more than he bit off." Until 1960, for example, no one, not even the author when he prepared the novel for republication in 1909, noticed that the order of two chapters in *The Ambassadors* had been reversed in every edition published since 1903. As the leftist literary critic Granville Hicks averred in *The Great Tradition* (1933), James's world is "a world of almost complete abstraction, in which he invents the situations and the people, and only the technique is constant."

A literary strategy that presumed a democracy of readers, realism was well suited to the discussion of a variety of topical social issues; that is, realistic novels were often "problem novels." Howells, for example, was admittedly inspired by Tolstói's ideas about economic equality and nonviolence: the Russian "has not influenced me in aesthetics only, but in ethics, too, so that I can never again see life in the way I saw it before I knew him." Howells strenuously protested the prosecution of the labor activists charged with fomenting a riot at Haymarket Square in Chicago in 1886 and the subsequent execution of four of them, what Howells publicly called their "civic murder." His sympathetic depiction of the martyred German socialist Lindau in *A Hazard of New Fortunes* registers a trace of these protests. Even James addressed the burgeoning social unrest in England in his novel *The Princess Casamassima* (1886). In the manner of Zola, James researched the novel and bragged to a friend that he had "been all the morning at Millbank prison (horrible place) collecting notes for a fiction scene. You see I am quite the Naturalist." Other novels of the period were thematically devoted to such issues as political corruption (e.g., Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner's *The Gilded Age*), war and military imperialism (Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, Howells's "Editha"), marriage and the "woman question" (Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Revolt of 'Mother,'" Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper"), urban squalor and prostitution (Crane's *Maggie*), environmentalism (Mary Austin's *The Land of Little Rain*), economic injustice (Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads*), immigration and expatriatism (Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*, Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*), alcoholism (Jack London's *John Barleycorn*), adulterated beef and the rights of labor (Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*), the repressive small town (Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*), religious hypocrisy (Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*), racism (Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, Frances E.W. Harper's *Iola Leroy*, Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* and *The Conjure Woman*), and the dangers of totalitarianism (London's *The Iron Heel*).

Still, most novels at the time were pitched to appeal to middle-class women readers. Howells estimated that 75 percent of all books and magazines sold in the US were bought by women. Lest they offend some readers, the original manuscript versions of *The Red Badge of Courage* and *Sister Carrie* were expurgated prior to publication, and the privately printed original version of Crane's *Maggie* (1893) was expurgated prior to its re-publication in 1896 by a mainstream publisher. Henry Adams opined in his *Education* that his friend Bret Harte depicted sex in his stories "as far as the magazines would let him venture." When John W. De Forest was asked in 1898 "why I always had a boy and girl in love in my books," he explained that "it was the only kind of plot a writer could get the public interested in." In his prospectus for *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), which might have been better entitled "Elizabeth Barrett Browning Meets Friedrich Nietzsche," Jack London assured the editor of *Century* that he would handle the romance of Maud Brewster and Humphrey Van Weyden, castaways on a deserted island, with discretion. "The American prudes will not be shocked by the second half of the book," he elsewhere confided. Howells believed that eventually "the element of love-making" would diminish in importance "in the better class of novels, . . . which should portray the passions and experiences of life in their natural proportion." To paraphrase Whitman, "To have great novelists, there must be great audiences too." Howells hoped that by instructing readers of the "better class," the school of realists might help to create an audience with such refined tastes that they would no longer demand love stories in their novels any more than epicures expect catsup on eggs.

In fact, Howells's (in)famous comment in 1886 that the "more smiling aspects of life . . . are the more American" should be weighed in the context of the American literary marketplace at the turn of the twentieth century. Howells in effect merely suggested that the novels of Zola et al., even in sanitized translations, would never attract a broad American readership. As Howells elsewhere explained, Zola applied the principles of realism "to an extent which would certainly not be permissible in an English writer, because of the different tone of the public of our day. In his extreme fidelity to his theory he makes his books impossible to the largest class of English speaking readers." That is, Howells's observation was neither as pious, prudish, nor as parochial as literary historians have presumed. More to the point, nearly a century before the poststructuralists Howells challenged the very concept of national literatures. As he insisted in September 1890: "I believe the tendency of the times is towards the formation of a World School in literature. The writers of the world have more uniformity of thought and expression today than they have ever had before . . . A novel written by one of the realistic school of writers in America today has, perhaps, its counterpart in a realistic story written 3,000 miles away in Spain . . . I think the spirit of the time is tending more and more toward the direction of a world literature than toward that of national or race literature." Henry James personally transcended national labels; he was born and raised in the US, was an expatriate in France as a young man and a resident Brit in middle age, and became a British citizen in 1915, a few months before his death – though he was interred in the family plot in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Certainly the rise of realism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a transnational literary movement influenced by many British and continental artists and intellectuals besides Tolstoi, Turgeneff, Dostoevsky, Balzac, and Flaubert. The evolution of realism was hardly confined to national borders or even to language groups. In his essay "Le Roman Expérimental" (1880) Zola proposed an analogy between empirical fiction and medical science, and the influence of Zola on American writers of the period can hardly be overstated. Frank Norris sometimes signed his letters "the boy Zola" and he modeled the marriage of the dentist and Trina in *McTeague* (1899) upon the marriage of Gervaise and Coupeau in Zola's *L'Assommoir*. Crane's *Maggie* also betrays its debts to Zola's *Nana*. Howells declared at Zola's death in 1902 that because Zola had "believed with his whole soul that fiction should be the representation, and in no measure the misrepresentation, of life, he will live as long as any history of literature survives." Kate Chopin was profoundly influenced by the fiction of the French realist Guy de Maupassant, and one contemporary reviewer of *The Awakening* (1899) complained that it was written with "a bald realism that fairly out Zolas Zola."

The English social theorist Herbert Spencer, who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest," was no less influential on the "new school" of fiction writers and on American realists in particular. As the historian Richard Hofstadter has explained, "Spencer's philosophy was admirably suited to the American scene. It was scientific in derivation and comprehensive in scope. It had a reassuring theory of progress based upon biology and physics." In his autobiography, Theodore Dreiser notes how, in 1894, Spencer's *First Principles* "blew me, intellectually, to bits" and left him "numb." His social-scientific belief in the importance of heredity and environment in the construction of character is evident in his portrayal of Carrie Meeber in *Sister Carrie* (1900) as a "waif amid forces"; of Frank Cowperwood in *The Financier* (1912), who learns from watching a battle between a squid and a lobster that "men lived on other men"; and of Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy* (1926), whose behavior the author explains in terms of "chemisms" or chemical reactions in the blood. As Malcolm Cowley among others has noted, the brand of realism called naturalism pioneered in America by Dreiser subtracts from literature the notion of human responsibility. Or as Dreiser wrote in *Sister Carrie*: "On the tiger no responsibility rests." Similarly, in his semi-autobiographical novel *Martin Eden* (1913), Jack London recounts his introduction to "the man Spencer" and his discovery that "There was no caprice, no chance. All was law."

The writings of the British naturalist Charles Darwin, particularly his theory of sexual selection, also left their mark on the literature of the period. As Bert Bender has suggested, "beginning in the 1870s and 1880s Darwin's influence was no less powerful in American fiction than it was in other fields of social thought." Among the novels Bender mentions in the course of his analysis: James's *The Bostonians*, Chopin's *The Awakening*, Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, and Chesnut's *The House behind the Cedars*. Edith Wharton's "The Descent of Man" (1904) not only takes its title from Darwin's 1871 book but refers to the degeneration of her protagonist, a natural scientist willing to compromise science for fame and fortune.

In contrast, the modern psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung were slow to influence American writers, if only because the first English translations of their major works did not appear until after the turn of the twentieth century. During the last months of his life, Jack London read Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1916) and dramatized some of the ideas in his short story "The Water Baby" (1916). Sherwood Anderson's *Windy McPherson's Son* may have been the first American novel to mention Freud explicitly – in 1922. By the middle of the "roaring Twenties," however, a diluted, popularized form of Freudianism had attracted a following in the US. Its infiltration of American culture may be inferred from Gilman's rants about the cult of Freud in the late 1920s. As she insisted in her essay "Feminism and Social Progress" (1929), for example, "we must disabuse our minds of that mire of psycho-sexual theory which is directly responsible for so much of present day perversion." She regarded the "pitifully narrow and morbid philosophy" of Freud as nothing more than a "resurgence of phallic worship." So pronounced was the influence of Freud and Jung by the early years of the Great Depression that F. Scott Fitzgerald depicted Dick Diver, the protagonist of *Tender is the Night* (1933), as a psychologist. In her autobiography, written a decade later, Ellen Glasgow declared that "the novel, as a living force, if not as a work of art, owes an incalculable debt to what we call, mistakenly, the new psychology, to Freud, . . . and more truly, I think, to Jung."

The school of realists also comprised the first generation of genuine literary professionals in the US. Such earlier "academists" as Longfellow, Emerson, and Lowell either lived on inherited wealth or earned their living by teaching and/or lecturing. Despite the gender-specificity of its title, Howells's point in his essay "The Man of Letters as a Man of Business" (1893) is well taken: "it is only since the Civil War that literature has become a business with us. Before that time we had authors . . . but I do not remember any of them who lived by literature" except perhaps Poe, "and we all know how he lived." In 1871, Bret Harte signed a contract to contribute exclusively to the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Every Other Week* for a twelvemonth at a salary of \$10,000, by far the most lucrative contract to that date in the history of American letters. Such new-generation storywriters as James and Harte hired the first literary agents in the early 1880s; contributed to the first newspaper syndicates in the mid-1880s; experimented with such gimmicks as subscription publication; and lobbied for the passage of the first international copyright laws in the early 1890s. By the 1890s, Howells's annual income from his writing averaged \$15,000–\$20,000. With the perfection of the Mergenthaler linotype machine, moreover, the number of magazines published in the US increased from about 200 in 1860 to about 1,800 in 1900 with a corresponding increase in opportunities for literary (and marketing) careers. In a nod to the burgeoning markets for consumer goods advertised alongside their stories, both Mark Twain and Bret Harte successfully sued publishing "pirates" on the grounds their signatures were trademarks or brand names that had been stolen. Ironically, the first American millionaire novelist, Jack London, wrote many popular tales (e.g., "To Build a Fire," "The Law of Life") that illustrated Darwinian "struggle for existence" in a manner radically at odds with both his own socialist convictions and lavish lifestyle. Ironically,

too, unlike the earlier writers of the "genteel tradition," many of the most celebrated writers of the period were autodidacts. Like Herman Melville, who bragged a man-of-war had been his Harvard and Yale, they never attended college, let alone graduated (e.g., Aldrich, Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett, De Forest, Mary Murfree, London, Constance Fenimore Woolson). Often they were journalists by training (e.g., Harte, Howells, Mark Twain, Dreiser, Bierce, Garland, Frederic, Gilman, Cahan). Even some who were college-educated became professional writers only after a career in journalism (e.g., Charles Dudley Warner, Cather, Crane).

Never governed by a set of static assumptions, American realism had begun to evolve beyond Howells and in the direction of modernism by the 1890s. (In 1901, Frank Norris referred derisively to Howellsian realism as "the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block," and in 1915 Howells admitted sadly to James that he had become "comparatively a dead cult with my statues cast down and the grass growing over them in the pale moonlight.") Stephen Crane was foremost among these innovators at the turn of the century. To be sure, Crane admired Howells, who had been a mentor to him. As he wrote a friend, Howells "developed all alone a little creed of art which I thought was a good one. Later I discovered that my creed was identical with the one of Howells and Garland." Nevertheless, Crane overstated his affinity with "the dean." In a terse, ironic, and apprehensional style, he depicted in his best and best-known novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) an ephemeral reality always shifting or changing in the consciousness of the observer Henry Fleming (lemming?). Events in the novel are mediated entirely through his imagination, like dots or strokes from a painter's brush, the literary equivalent of pointillism in painting. Reality exists only insofar as Henry apprehends it. Consider this passage from chapter V: "Once he saw a tiny battery go dashing along the line of the horizon. The tiny riders were beating the tiny horses." Obviously, Henry perceives the battery at a far distance; he does not *literally* watch a miniature battery. In the course of the battle, he perceives an absurd world without explanations save for those he invents. Confronted by evidence of his utter insignificance, he adopts new illusions rather than accept the truth about his life. With good reason, Joseph Conrad called Crane "a complete impressionist," and Eric Solomon has suggested *Red Badge* "should be called an impressionistic-naturalistic novel – or vice-versa" (Solomon, 1966). In fact, Crane explicitly compared his style to impressionistic painting in his sketch "War Memories" (1899): "I bring this to you merely as an effect – an effect of mental light and shade, if you like: something done in thought similar to that which the French Impressionists do in color; something meaningless and at the same time overwhelming, crushing, monstrous." Predictably, Ernest Hemingway admired Crane's writing, particularly his stories "The Blue Hotel" (1898) and "The Open Boat" (1898). In the former tale, set in a symbolic world of blind chance, a contested card game morphs into a fistfight between two characters, one of whom is eventually killed by a third man, a gambler. Crane offers the reader alternative conclusions to the story, one of them rigidly deterministic, the other a Howellsian ending in which he invokes the notion of "complicity," that no one sins or suffers alone. Either conclusion works; the clear implication is that Howells's doctrine fails to

explain all the events of the story. In the latter tale, based upon Crane's own experience after the sinking of the *Commodore* off the Florida coast during the Spanish–American War, four characters adrift in a dinghy after a shipwreck contemplate their deaths. At the edge of annihilation, the “distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear” – as is Crane's irony – and the correspondent (a Crane persona) “understands that if he were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words, and be better and brighter during an introduction or at a tea.” In context, the “distinction between right and wrong” to a person contemplating death in an absurd universe is nothing more than a code of polite conduct. Ironically, too, the oiler, ostensibly the most fit of the characters in the open boat, is the only one who dies in the surf while trying to reach shore. Apparently there are exceptions even to the Spencerian law of “survival of the fittest.” Or as Crane wrote in one of his bitterly ironic poems,

A man said to the universe,
“Sir, I exist!”
“However,” replied the universe,
“The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation.”

Edith Wharton also transcended the realism of Howells and James. She observed in her autobiography that Howells was an “irreducible recluse” and that she “seldom met him. I always regretted this for I had a great admiration for ‘A Modern Instance’ and ‘Silas Lapham,’ and should have liked to talk with their author about the art in which he stood so nearly among the first.” But he “remained inaccessible.” Though she was a close friend of James – she referred to him as her “Rédacteur” and once allowed that she had “never doubted that Henry James was great” – she was not his disciple but a major literary artist in her own right. In *The House of Mirth* (1905), a “novel of manors” about the mores of Old New York and European hotel society, she subverted the sentimental conventions of popular nineteenth-century novels no less than Howells and James. The aunt who should protect Lily Bart instead disinherits her; the friend who should shelter her instead betrays her to save her own reputation; and the man who ought to honor her instead doubts her virtue. In her characterization of Lily, who has been bred to and yet resists the leisure-class “marriage market,” Wharton also betrayed the influence of Darwin and the new science. As she writes, “Inherited tendencies had combined with early training to make her the highly specialized product she was; an organism as helpless out of its narrow range as the sea-anemone torn from the rock. She had been fashioned to adorn and delight; to what other end does nature round the rose leaf and paint the humming-bird's breast?” In her short novel *Ethan Frome* (1911), too, Wharton revises the local-color realism of earlier New England regionalists. In her autobiography, Wharton averred that in her portrayal of Starkfield, Massachusetts, she wished to “draw life as it really was” in rural New England, in contrast to the depiction of it through “rose-coloured spectacles.” Read through a critical lens that focuses on the ambiguous character of Mattie Silver, moreover, the novel is no more the simple

story of a hopeless love triangle than James's "The Turn of the Screw" is a straightforward ghost story. Instead of reciprocating Ethan's affection, Mattie is a conniving minx who plays on his goodwill in a vain attempt to remain in Starkfield. That is, Wharton's radical experiment in point of view has gone largely unappreciated.

Willa Cather developed her own chastened aesthetic in contrast to the realism of Howells. Cather thought "the dean" a timid writer whose typical characters were "very common little men in sack coats." She praised James Herne's play *Shore Acres* (1896) – "It comes nearer than any other play to doing for New England on the stage what Howells has done for it in fiction" – with a commanding qualification: such plays "are like health to a sick man and remind one that realism is not absolutely a synonym for evil." Cather presumed to redefine realism in her novels and criticism, most obviously in her essay "The Novel D meubl " (1922): "There is a popular superstition that 'realism' asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects, in explaining mechanical processes, the methods of operating manufactories and trades, and in minutely and unsparingly describing physical sensations. But is not realism, more than it is anything else, an attitude of mind on the part of the writer toward his material . . . ?" Cather disparaged the literalness of most realistic fiction, which she compared to journalism or "mere verisimilitude," singled out D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* for special censure, and called for a new realism similar to modern painting in which writers "interpret imaginatively the material and social investiture of their characters; to present their scene by suggestion rather than enumeration." Or as she declared elsewhere, "Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there – that, one might say, is created." Her realism consists of silhouette rather than extended physical description, of vignette rather than sustained plot. The "mood is the thing – all the little figures and stories are mere improvisations that come out of it," as she explained. Cather traced her own manner of writing back to James, "that mighty master of language and keen student of human actions and motives," and praised Crane for his advances beyond realism: he "was one of the first post-impressionists." She expressed only qualified approval of *The Awakening* ("next time I hope that Miss Chopin will devote that flexible iridescent style of hers to a better cause") and championed Jewett's story-cycle *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (her stories "melt into the land and the life of the land until they are not stories at all, but life itself").

As Janis P. Stout has concluded, Cather was a "writer of seemingly transparent narratives that turn out to be radically indeterminate" (Stout, 2000). Among the best of her novels are *My  ntonia* (1918), an unsettled homesteading narrative, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), based upon Cather's historical and ethnological research in the American Southwest. In the first, the narrator Jim Burden is a homeless transient, a traveler who only infrequently comes to Nebraska; "his"  ntonia Shimerda or the  ntonia of his imagination is the daughter of an immigrant family near the rural town of Black Hawk, her father a pitiful figure who, homesick for Bohemia, dies a suicide. The novel is set at a transitional moment in the American West, when Anglo immigrants from the East have been superseded by European exiles who try to preserve

their native cultures. Yet in the end it is Burden, a railroad lawyer, who is as displaced as Mr. Shimerda, certainly more displaced than *Ántonia*, who eventually marries and has a family, assimilates at least to the extent that she has neighbors and a home, and is “battered but not diminished” by her experiences on the prairie. She is a heroic and, at least to Burden, a luminous and inspirational figure – though in the end all the reader knows of her is what Burden, a not entirely reliable narrator, writes in his putative private manuscript about her. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, set against the backdrop of Catholic missions in New Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century, Cather ponders the consequences of cultural and intellectual colonization, of the common purposes of conversion and conquest, of the unspoken alliance between the church and the military in the course of empire. A lament for the “vanishing Americans,” the story is largely told from the perspective of a sympathetic figure who believes in the inevitability of their eradication – no small narrative achievement. Jean-Marie Latour, the title character, is an ambiguous figure: a man of deep faith, he nevertheless tolerates violence against Native Americans, represented by his friendship with the Indian scout Kit Carson, in order to advance the cause of Christianity. He belongs to the church of Peter, the figurative “rock” on which Christ built his church, while the Indians at *Ácoma Pueblo* “actually lived upon their Rock.” Yet the holy sites of each culture are denigrated by the other. Latour is physically sickened by his visit to a cavern, significantly “shaped somewhat like a Gothic chapel,” that is sacred to Natives. “No white man knows anything about Indian religion,” an Indian trader tells Latour. Indians may be converted to Catholicism, but they will resist indoctrination: “The things they value most are worth nothing to us.” The Romanesque cathedral Latour builds in Santa Fe, the overarching symbol of the success of his mission, testifies as much to the Plow, the Locomotive, and the Musket Triumphant as to the glory of the Church.

Like Cather, Ellen Glasgow pushed beyond the limits of Howellsian realism. As Glasgow reminisced in her autobiography, much as she respected Howells, she had determined that “I would not allow myself to come within the magic circle of his charm and his influence. For more than one full generation all the well-thought of fiction in America was infected by the dull gentility of his realism, and broke out in a rash of refinement . . . And so, at the turn of the century, I owed less than nothing to these creators.” In her finest novel, *Barren Ground* (1925), she embraced a code of stoicism “sufficient for life or for death,” as she wrote later. “I wrote *Barren Ground*, and immediately I knew I had found myself.” An underrated novel, it combines elements of the melodramatic and sensational, the determinism of the naturalists, an analysis of southern class conflict reminiscent of Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell, in a sophisticated style that betrays the influence of Henry James and “the sobering English tradition.” From Tolstoi she had learned “a transcendent maturity . . . Tolstoy made me see clearly what I had realized dimly, that the ordinary is simply the universal observed from the surface, that the direct approach to reality is not without, but within.” Not until she wrote *Barren Ground*, she recalled, had she ever felt “an easy grasp of technique, a practiced authority over style and material.” Glasgow’s publisher in fact declared that

in this novel, set in Virginia, realism had “crossed the Potomac.” Between the ages of 20 and 50, Glasgow’s heroine Dorinda Oakley suffers the torments of betrayal and hard work, a marriage of convenience, and the death of loved ones, and though she may not triumph, at least she endures and survives. She inherits the iron character of her Scotch Calvinist mother, in contrast to Jason Greylock, the man she loves and would have married, who deteriorates in the course of the novel into an indecisive, bankrupt drunkard like his father. In the end, Dorinda’s life is not a happy one, but it is satisfying. As Glasgow writes, “The vein of iron which had supported her through adversity was merely the instinct older than herself, stronger than circumstances, deeper than the shifting surface of emotion; the instinct that had said, ‘I will not be broken.’”

Published in the same year as *Barren Ground*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* represents another take on American life after the Great War. Fitzgerald’s novel participates in the American success story tradition originated by Ben Franklin in his *Autobiography* and epitomized by the dozens of formulaic juvenile tales Horatio Alger, Jr., published in the late nineteenth century. The realists adopted the theme as their own, with qualifications. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) Howells demonstrated how his hero is ennobled by his moral rise, not by the trappings of economic success, and in *The Minister’s Charge* (1886) he had realistically rewritten the country-boy myth popularized by Alger. Similarly, Abraham Cahan rewrote the success story from the point of view of the ambitious immigrant in *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917). Particularly in *The Financier*, the first volume of his “trilogy of desire,” Theodore Dreiser invented the naturalistic anti-success story, with an antihero significantly named Frank Algernon (= not an Alger hero) Cowperwood. Though Fitzgerald emerged from this realist tradition – he acknowledged his respect for Tolstoi in *The Crack-Up* – it remained for him to write an ironic success story in *The Great Gatsby*, an elegy on the death of the “American Dream.”

Put another way, Fitzgerald parodied Alger in order to satirize what William James had called “the bitch-goddess Success.” In his story “Absolution” (1924), which Fitzgerald considered publishing as a prologue to *Gatsby*, his young hero owns a shelf of Alger books. The novel, published the next year, may be thus fairly considered a sequel to an ironic version of Alger’s tired and true parable of success. *Gatsby* is a capitalist, albeit a criminal type, a bootlegger apparently involved in the illegal oil dealings later known as Teapot Dome – much like his friend Meyer Wolfsheim, who simply “saw the opportunity” to fix the World Series and exploited it. In Fitzgerald’s ironic version of the success story, the way to wealth is through bootlegging or gambling or fraud, the “foul dust that floated in the wake of his dreams.” *Gatsby*’s patron Dan Cody buys his protégé “a blue coat, six pairs of white duck trousers, and a yachting cap,” much as the Alger hero acquires a new suit of clothes, and he changes his name from Jimmy Gatz to Jay *Gatsby* “at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career,” much as Alger’s heroes change their names from “Ragged Dick,” for example, to “Richard Hunter.” *Gatsby*’s erstwhile lover Daisy Buchanan, whose voice “sounds like money,” also takes her first name from James’s ingénue Daisy Miller. The narrator

Nick Carraway is a type of Jamesian figure who never quite “fixes” Gatsby in his lens any more than Winterbourne (or, for that matter, Gatsby) comprehends the elusive Daisy. Fitzgerald also sharply distinguishes between the Long Island villages of East Egg (where the old-moneyed families like the Buchanans live) and West Egg (where the nouveau riche Gatsby resides). En route from their homes to the financial center of Wall Street, the characters must traverse a symbolic wasteland, a valley of ashes. In brief, Fitzgerald rewrites Alger from a modern perspective, ridiculing the innocence and naïveté of success-idolators.

Under the influence of such figures as Howells, James, Wharton, Cather, and Fitzgerald, American fiction matured during the half-century between about 1875 and 1925. This period was marked by the rise of a class of professional authors, formalized by the founding of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1904. In all, the major fiction writers of this period broke with the tradition of fanciful romance championed by Hawthorne and Melville and established a new experimental tradition of realism and naturalism that anticipated the modernism of Faulkner, Hemingway, Richard Wright, John Steinbeck, and Flannery O'Connor.

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Making It New: Constructions of Modernisms

Heinz Ickstadt

Like all labels put on literary periods, “modernism” suggests a commonality of purpose and a uniformity of style that cannot be found in the texts themselves. The term not only refers to (without distinguishing between them) a great number of quite different, even contradictory theories and practices but also to different phases of literature and art during the first part of the twentieth century. As in the case of “postmodernism,” a long and intense debate has confirmed that the phenomenon exists, but apparently reduced our ability to grasp it.¹ Where and when does it begin? When does it end? What belongs and what doesn’t? On the most general level, we can say that modernism was the artistic equivalent of the social, economic, and technological processes of modernization, the symbolic expression of the experience of cultural modernity. But was it an affirmation or a negation of modernist culture, or did it affirm it even in denying it? Was it part of a progressive tradition (the tradition of the Enlightenment), or was it secretly (in some cases not so secretly at all) allied with fascism, and – despite its revolutionary posturing – a bastion of racism and white patriarchy? Was modernism merely a phase in the unfolding of capitalist culture, or was it a unique moment in the literary and cultural history of the last century, and is postmodernism, accordingly, no more than a weak echo of modernism’s past achievements? It is not only that modernism itself seems to have so many different faces and phases, it is also that we have learned to read it in so many different ways: first, from the perspective of aesthetic innovation, then, more recently, from that of gender, class and race – each time with new and different results. Confronted with such heterogeneity, it surely makes more sense to speak of “modernisms” (as Peter Nicholls and others in fact do²) – except that there is yet a recognizable signature that suggests the singular.

Critics usually place “modernism” within the context of “modernization” and “modernity” – terms that are themselves in dire need of definition. “Modernization” refers to the processes of social change that followed the industrial and technological revolutions of the eighteenth and, at a much higher rate of acceleration, the nineteenth centuries. “Modernity” is perhaps best understood as referring to the individual

and collective experience of “modernization.” It connotes a cultural awareness of the New that issues from the experience of change: a state of consciousness in which hope and expectation are mixed with a sense of alienation, anxiety, and crisis. In addition, “modernity” also connotes a specific iconography of the modern: the metropolis and its system of signs (skyscraper, advertisement, cinema, the chaos of urban traffic and the movement of urban masses) as well as the technological instruments of speed and modern warfare. “Modernism” refers to those literary and artistic practices that, in their attempt to express a consciousness of modernity, either radically break with dominant concepts of art and established manners of representation (if not with the concept of representation altogether) or rediscover, in the name of the new, forgotten traditions and work them into new forms of expression.³

The word “modern” itself has a long history. The quarrel between “*les anciens*” and “*les modernes*” is a literary topos that goes back to the classic tradition. It is only with Charles Baudelaire – generally regarded the first “modernist” at least in Europe – that the term “modern” received an urgency of meaning it had never had before (in the sense of an absolute commitment to a principle of radical innovation). Baudelaire’s concept of the literary modern is rooted in the awareness of belonging to a period of cultural modernity (as much as, incidentally, to a period of intense modernization) – a period he abhorred despite his admitted fascination with it. This ambivalence is characteristic of modernism in general: even where it sees itself in conjunction with the forces of modernization it takes a position against the status quo. In destroying existing conventions, it proposes to give expression to as yet unrealized spiritual possibilities: the hidden “essence” of modernity.

At least in modernism’s early phase, the borderline between aesthetics and politics was not sharply drawn. The various formations of the avant-garde did not see the aesthetic as separated from the realm of history. Rather it is in the symbolic realm of art where the realization of the New in all areas of life is anticipated in the revolution of artistic form. Hence the fascination of these early modernists (of Marinetti and the Futurists, for instance) with destruction and *tabula rasa*, their almost ecstatic acceptance of chaos, war and revolution as means of escape from a repressive culture. Although Marinetti’s enthusiasm for the dynamics of war was not a shared characteristic, all avant-gardes (no matter how intensely Dadaists, Futurists, Constructivists, or Surrealists fought and despised each other) converged in a single project: the destruction of the existing culture and their anticipation of the new.

Historians of modernism usually distinguish between the collectivism of avant-garde movements and the singularity of the modernist masters. At least for the early phase from the turn of the century throughout World War I, such a distinction does not really apply: Singular as they may be, later masters – like Ezra Pound – are supplied by, as much as they supply to, an international network of artistic experimentation. Although he tried to erase the traces, Pound’s “Vorticism” owed much to the Futurists. It is only in its second phase – after the apocalyptic experience of war – that modernism becomes a matter of “masters” and of “master works” (*Ulysses*, *The Waste*

Land, The Cantos). Whereas the early avant-gardes had aimed at the destruction of a traditional concept of art (through the dissolution of form and the integration of non-artistic material) and at a merging of art and life in general, the great modernist texts of the twenties and after display a consciousness of art and artistry that is directed almost as much against the anti-art experimentalism of the avant-garde as against the shallowness of the dominant culture.

This new balance between experiment and formal order can be explained by the fact that, after the iconoclasm of the avant-gardes, the New itself was becoming a usable "tradition." This may have been the result of the very logic of innovation which enforced an ever more rigorous exploration of the possibilities of medium and of genre, and in doing so exhausted itself. It may also be possible that after the experience of chaos, a longing for order (however flexible and "open") replaced that for aesthetic anarchy. In any case, the modernists of this phase increasingly de-emphasized the experimental by merging it with more traditional manners and concepts of composition. (As, for instance, in the "classical" phase of Stravinsky or Picasso, which foregrounds strict compositional order.) This tendency increased throughout the thirties in part from developments (in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union) hostile to modernist aesthetics. But even in the United States, the demand for a more democratic art pushed modernism toward more accessible forms of expression.

The third phase of modernism coincides with its institutionalization by a critical formalism that, in the wake of World War II, created a literary tradition after its own image. It is a period of late works and the canonization of the great masters: the Nobel prizes of the postwar years go to Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway. In this last phase, modernism has come to represent a humanist heritage that had withstood the horrors of the German concentration camps and the disaster of another world war. Its aesthetic order (wrested from the chaos of the modern world) was evidence of a surviving Western cultural tradition, and the predominantly academic exegesis of its texts became a touchstone of critical sensibility and literary intelligence. It was this purified modernism, centered in the figure of T.S. Eliot, that was elevated by the New Critics to the rank of a new classicism, and its structures and aesthetic principles were taught in English Departments of American universities as a set of critical rules and tools. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's pioneering *Understanding Poetry* (1938) came to form the literary consciousness of several generations of students from the late forties to the mid-sixties. It was the textbook of an increasingly restrictive tradition against which a new generation of poets and novelists rebelled – in an ironic repetition of history – by reviving the aesthetic anarchism of the early avant-gardes which, in their eyes, was the true heritage of modernism.

There can be no doubt that modernism was an international phenomenon. It was the result of a highly creative cultural conflict between generations: the radical break of sons obsessed by an idea of the New with the repressive culture of their Victorian fathers. It was essentially the product of the modernizing societies of the West (including western Russia), and its favorite environment was the locus *par excellence*

of all modernizing processes: the modern metropolis. Paris, London, Berlin, Milan, St. Petersburg, New York were its centers.

Modernism not only had several phases but also many different faces: It gave artistic expression to that cultural discontent that Freud had articulated more or less at the same time in psychoanalytical terms. Accordingly, it drew its creative energy from the liberation (and symbolic taming) of the cultural repressed – of the dark, primitive, identity-dissolving Other of Western civilization.⁴ The ambivalence of this fascination led to highly diverse, contradictory and often questionable practices and political alliances. Modernism explored its dark “Other” by integrating “feminine” regions of the psyche – at the same time that it propagated an aesthetic ideology of “maleness”; or it indulged in fantasies of ethnic and racial otherness that allowed for the creative integration of the culturally “primitive” without questioning existing racial hierarchies. It was anarchic and revolutionary vis-à-vis the dominant conventions and expectations of the bourgeoisie; but also obsessed with the search for a “Wholeness” lost in the spiritual wasteland of a modernized and fragmented society. It welcomed (and contributed to) the decay of bourgeois values (like that of the Protestant work ethic) and thus acted in covert – sometimes also in overt – alliance with social forces accelerating that decay: with the energies (and products) of modern technology, with the temptations of consumer capitalism but also with the revolutionary or reactionary prophets of a New Society. It was democratic vis-à-vis the institutionalised high culture of Victorianism, but its elitist insistence on form and craftsmanship was directed against the democratic formlessness of mass culture.

Inconsistencies and contradictions such as these are thus perhaps the only shared characteristic of modernism seen on an international scale. Particularities can be grasped only from within the various contexts of “a distinctly national tradition.” American modernism, although part of the international modernist network, was more than a provincial imitation of European developments. It has to be seen as the product of an intercultural exchange in which new concepts and practices of innovation were adapted to a national tradition. The sharp distinction that is frequently made between those cosmopolitan American artists and writers who – like Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot – left the United States to become founders and promoters of a transatlantic modernism and those – like Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams – who stayed at home to cultivate the local is perhaps not entirely justified. Not only was there a constant going back and forth: the little magazines sprouting in New York during the teens and twenties were filled with texts of the various European avant-gardes translated from Italian, French, and German. Staying at home was a conscious choice which did not necessarily imply withdrawal from the international context of the modernist movement.

But the perspective from outside made not only the contrasts and antagonisms of the different European avant-gardes shrink to a single gesture of rebellion, it also swept together in a simultaneous reception what was a temporal sequence of manifestos and events. Accordingly, there was comparatively little partisan loyalty: American modernists experimented with whatever style came to hand and suited their own

purposes. The differences between Futurism, Dada, Surrealism – even when they were recognized – were not really essential since they had to be adjusted to American contexts and concepts. To be sure, the circles around Alfred Stieglitz, Walter and Louise Arensberg and Mabel Dodge Luhan served each a different clientele, Stieglitz being affiliated with the cultural nationalists, the Arensbergs with Duchamp and Dada, Mable Dodge Luhan with the political and the aesthetic avant-gardes alike. But their members did not form rigid factions (occasional quarrels between them notwithstanding). Futurism's glorification of the machine, Dada's attack on the status of bourgeois art and culture, and modernism's general fascination with the energies of the unconscious and the primitive – all these were transformed and acquired a different meaning in the American context.

For although the modernism of the early twentieth century was clearly a European invention, it seemed natural to transplant and adapt it to a country that saw itself as the champion of the technological modern, certainly as vanguard among modernizing nations. The discrepancy between America's technological modernity and its cultural backwardness – that the most progressive of nations should be colonially dependent on Victorian culture – merged the search for the modern with a quasi-postcolonial search for genuine national self-expression and cultural independence. "Americanism, apart from the genteel tradition, is simply modernism – purer in America than elsewhere because less impeded and qualified by survivals of the past," George Santayana wrote in his famous attack on the genteel tradition. And Gertrude Stein – although she felt compelled to leave America in order to become a modern writer – was convinced that modernism had its natural home in the United States since the US had entered the twentieth century earlier than any other nation.⁵ In his perceptive book on American modernism, *A Homemade World*, Hugh Kenner explored the implications of Stein's belief. In his eyes, American writers (those, that is, who stayed at home) were forced to practice art "as though its moral commitments were like technology's," and in doing so, they produced a modernism of their own, "a homemade variety." Since Kenner's perspective is that of an earlier transatlantic modernism, it is hard to miss the note of condescension for this home-made, self-made, and therefore slightly crude and provincial version of what modern European art had achieved so brilliantly. But it is also difficult to miss the implications of "at homeness" that are part and parcel of the home-made.⁶

Yet it was precisely this "self-made-ness" as well as the "at-homeness" (i.e., the insistence on a local belonging) that made American modernism seem less revolutionary and more conventional in European eyes. And indeed, if to be modern was already implicit in America's self-interpretation, then, modernism did not have to radically break with American ideals and realities. Rather it meant to uncover what was in front of everybody's eyes or to rediscover and work out what was always already inherently there. American modernism thus made its search for genuine self-expression a national (but not necessarily a nationalist) project which drew its energy from several sources. Perhaps the most important of these was the larger context of the progressive movement which wanted to "modernize" the cultural order of Victorianism by softening its

social and moral hierarchies, by opening them downward to include – and thus to also symbolically control and colonize – the new realities of urban life and immigrant existence. In its attempt to save the cultural order by extending it, Progressivism inevitably also weakened it, however. Intellectuals became increasingly disaffected with a dominant Anglo-Saxon culture and showed a growing fascination with what they took to be the more vital, life-asserting, more colorful cultures of the immigrant and the African-American. Their cultural discontent found expression in Jane Addams's involvement with Chicago's immigrant poor as much as in Hutchins Hapgood's interest in Jewish life on New York's Lower East Side, in Van Wyck Brooks's attacks on the life-denying cultural heritage of the Puritans, in Randolph Bourne's vision of America as a transnational federation of cultures and, several years later, in Carl Van Vechten's expeditions into Harlem. In addition, there was an increasing readiness to accept as genuinely indigenous cultural expression everything the guardians of the Victorian order had excluded from their concept of culture: the various popular arts, the cinema, the advertisement. In his short-lived little magazine (1916/17) significantly called *The Soil*, R.J. Coady not only published articles by Charlie Chaplin and on Bert Williams, he also pronounced views on a yet-to-be-created American art that had long-lasting echoes in subsequent debates:

There is an American Art. Young, robust, energetic, naive, immature, daring and big spirited. Active in every conceivable field . . . We are developing a new culture here. Its elements are gathering from all over the earth . . . Traditions are being merged, blood is being mixed . . . Our art is, as yet, outside of our art world. It's in the spirit of the Panama Canal. It's in the East River and the Battery. It's in Pittsburgh and Duluth. It's coming from the ball field, the stadium and the ring. Already we've made our beginnings, scattered here and there, but beginnings with enormous possibilities.⁷

The tone and the gesture are unmistakably Whitmanesque and it is evident that this search for the new and modern sees itself as part of a "tradition of the new" (the term is Harold Rosenberg's) that goes back to Emerson's call for new beginnings and for cultural independence. Evident, also, is an intense consciousness of change, of things in motion. Coady's rhetoric not only points back to Emerson but is also continued in Randolph Bourne's awareness that "we are not dealing with static factors, but with fluid and dynamic generations" and in pragmatism's attempt to think order as process. Images of fluidity, of motion and of process abound in the literary, cultural, and philosophical texts of the period.

The American culture of modernity is dominated by two discourses of the modern which, although clearly different from each other, touch and overlap. The first, associated by David Hollinger with the cultural figure of the "Knower," is progressive, part of the tradition of the Enlightenment, characterized by a belief in science, rational order, the evidence of the senses, in short, by a belief in finding and by "strategies of reference." In literature and the arts it is evident as a commitment to realism and has produced texts which deal with modernization and the complex experience of modernity, explore the material of the urban or industrial scene, negotiate between

the contradictory desires for change and for stability. Such texts project, in fiction or in painting, highly symbolic zones of mixing and transgression where social and cultural borderlines are crossed and new roles are tested in the conflict between moral order and the pull of new experience. The novels of Kate Chopin, Ernest Poole, or Theodore Dreiser come to mind, also the paintings of the Ash-Can School. The second discourse, however, is that of modernism proper. Hollinger associates it with the figure of the "Artificer," self-sufficient, bent on "making." It makes the experience of modernity – the tension between stability and process, the energies of urban life – a matter not only of content but of concept, form and language.⁸

These two discourses generate their own avant-gardes, their own set of little magazines, their own circles of communication. Yet they also interact, socially as well as conceptually. Although there is a temporal sequence, one cannot say that the "modernist" discourse historically replaces the "progressive" one since during the thirties the sequence is once again turned around. I would argue that modernism in American literature and art develops through the dialogic (sometimes antagonistic) tension between them. For it is the increasingly problematic status of our knowledge of the "real" that drives the first discourse toward formal innovation and linguistic self-consciousness (as, for instance, in James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*) – just as the second discourse, although apparently breaking with the mode of realism, does not completely relinquish what Hollinger calls "strategies of reference." Dos Passos would be one example, William Carlos Williams another, Charles Sheeler a third. Sheeler's paintings fluctuate between abstraction and the precise rendering of objects. Paintings like "Church Street El," "American Interior," "Americana," "Totems in Steel" (all from the 1920s) form designs of lines and surfaces abstracted from objects of everyday use: they seem to reveal the geometric order hidden in the world of appearances.⁹ In his paintings of the 1930s, however – for example, in the various representations of Henry Ford's River Rouge plant – it is the object itself that, in the words of Sheeler, "already contains the structural design of abstraction in its very appearance and is therefore available to realistic representation."¹⁰ This trust in the referential is part and parcel of Sheeler's belief in the continuity of American values: in the value of workmanship which linked the artist with the craftsman and the engineer, but also in the dignity of common objects. (Agee would even speak of the "holiness" of the "unimagined" reality of the democratic real.¹¹)

To be sure, there are similar developments in Europe and, as pointed out before, the tendency to re-approach the order of the referential is almost universal in the late 1920s and, even more so, in the 1930s. I would argue, however, that in the US the two discourses of cultural modernity were never that much apart. They were held together by their affinity to a pragmatist aesthetics that identified "finding" with "making" and worked towards a "continuity between the energies of art and the processes of daily life." The last phrase is William Carlos Williams's who in an important essay on Alfred Stieglitz also claimed that "the new and the real, hard to come by, are synonymous."¹² The newness of the real is always already there but it has to be made visible and available through a re-making of the senses and a constant renewal of language. Even if the

new cannot be considered as being exclusively American, the American real and the really American always connote the new. This newness is, on the one hand, an already given and, at the same time, something that still has to be expressed and thus “created,” “made.” It is at once essence and in motion, always changing – latently present and yet to be made present in the act of expressing an unfolding Now of experience.¹³

Williams thus merges a modernist aesthetic strategy – similar to Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarization – with a concept of America: “In these studies,” Williams writes in his epigraph to *In the American Grain*, “I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid . . . In letters, in journals, reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names were constituted.”¹⁴ For Williams, the project of American modernism – like the project of democracy in Dewey’s definition¹⁵ – is open-ended, unfinished and unfinishable, an ongoing linguistic revolution, a process of constantly re-making and working out what was originally given in the continental fact, the local soil, the democratic idea which form the spiritual essence of America.

This tension between concrete reference and abstract construction, essence and process, newness and lost (yet latently present) origin has many echoes in modernisms elsewhere but is of particular relevance in the American context. It throws light on three different yet related aspects of American modernism: the importance of the visual, of the vernacular, and of putting on the mask of the “primitive.”

Pound’s “Imagism” (as documented in his “A Few Don’ts” of 1915) was not only the earliest but also the most influential “movement” of modern American poetry. It has even been argued that “‘Modernism’ in literature has been haunted by the spirit of ‘imagism’ . . .”

Perhaps one could say with equal justification that modern American poetry has been “haunted” by Emerson’s figure of the “transparent eye-ball” in which the “mere” eye of everyday perception is transcended in the all-encompassing grasp of visionary seeing. Indeed, whether acknowledged or not, Emerson’s ideas have left a visible trace in the rhetoric of American modernism: not only his linking of the I (as self-reliant subject) to the Eye as its main instrument of perception and cognition; but also his connecting the act of seeing with the act of knowing and both to an effort to construct the world by (re)naming it – a world always already there and yet to be made new through its visual and sensuous reconstruction in language. With Emerson, therefore, the eye is not at all a passive receptacle of impressions but “plastic,” active, the best of artists, the best composer; it never just sees but constructs in its seeing so that “we come to look at the world with new eyes.” For the imagination expresses itself in “a very high sort of seeing, which does not come by study, but by the intellect being *where* and *what* it sees.”¹⁶ Although, with Emerson, the *where* and *what* of seeing was notoriously difficult to state, his disciple and fellow-transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau placed and defined his seeing with the precision of the naturalist: By intensely observing the object and describing it as it appears to the eye, he comes to recognize, in its very appearance, its hidden essence.

The Imagists would presumably have rejected the implied vagueness of Emerson's idealizing vision – as much as they would have separated the “I” from the “Eye” since, in their notion of the act of seeing, they shifted emphasis from the subject to the object of perception. For Ezra Pound and his friends, Imagism was a double counter-discourse: On the one hand, it evoked a classical tradition of Greek marble, thus setting the notion of a clear and hard image against the ornamental and emotional vagueness of late-romantic or Victorian verse. On the other hand, the concept of an image hard and solid as marble also set the stillness of the classic against contemporary culture's voracious demand for moving images. The postulate of a “direct treatment of the thing” (“straight as the Greeks”) was part of an anti-subjectivist project (as was Eliot's “objective correlative,” or Hemingway's “iceberg theory”) that tried to avoid any direct expression of emotion by finding its “sensory equivalent” in the objective and visually concrete image. However, the very evocation of classic stillness implied an aesthetic ideal of the statuesque which seemed, in its very stylization, conventional and academic. Therefore Pound very soon went from Imagism to what he called Vorticism, and argued for a more dynamic notion of the image. He had become aware that the new developments in literature and the arts went *with* and not *against* the dynamics of modernity.

“To study BLAST and related books and journals of 1914,” Marjorie Perloff writes in her book on early modernism, *The Futurist Moment*, “is to see that, whatever the protests lodged by Pound and his artist friends, Vorticism would not have come into being without the Futurist model.”¹⁷ (171) And indeed, in its opening manifesto, Vorticism, like Italian Futurism, draws its inspiration “from machinery, Factories, new and vaster buildings, bridges and works.”¹⁸ In the name of Vorticism Pound dynamizes, energizes his concept of the image – of the image not as an equivalent to mood or sentiment but as formal expression of emotional energy, “a sense of sudden liberation.” Although visual concreteness is still essential (as is apparent in Pound's famous *Metro* poem), emphasis has been clearly shifted to juxtaposition and dynamic correlation, and thus to mental process: “An ‘Image’ is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time,” thus Pound's new definition. “It is a radiant node or cluster; it is . . . a VORTEX, from which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from its necessity came the name ‘Vorticism’. *Nomina sunt consequentia rerum* . . .”¹⁹ If names indeed issue from things, they must show them as in a state of activity and motion. Through the dynamics of the image the mind/body is connected to the patterns of a “world of moving energies.” “An image, in our sense, is real because we know it directly.” We know it with “a subtle and instantaneous perception . . . such as savages and wild animals have of the necessities and dangers of the forest.”²⁰

Such promise of a more direct, a more “primitive” (or “original”) knowledge – via a perception which would seem to link the eye to a larger kinetic and instinctual apparatus – made Pound appreciate Ernest Fenollosa's work on the “Chinese Written Character.” According to Fenollosa, Chinese writing was a system of notation “based upon a vivid shorthand picture of the operations of nature.”²¹ As a form of writing it

was closer to original perception than any form of Western writing ever could be. In contrast to the abstract linear sentence structure of Western grammars, the Chinese ideogram creates “a mosaic field by merely ‘combining several pictorial elements in a single character.’”²² For its ideographic roots “carry in them a verbal idea of action” Fenollosa, 1968: 9). Things as well as nouns are thus never seen in isolation but always in active interrelation with each other. “The eye sees noun and verb in one: things in motion, motion in things” (p. 10). In Fenollosa’s eyes, the pictorial method is a language close to a lost or forgotten origin and, at the same time, the ideal language of a future world. Pound could easily connect this concept of the Chinese ideogram with his own idea of vortex, as a cluster of images, charged with semantic energy, an equation expressive of things in action and relation, of mental processes open to, and connected with, a universe in flux.

Although William James called Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* “a new kind of realism,” reality, for Stein, was constituted by composition, i.e., it was a matter of the materiality of words, their individual value, their syntactical arrangement. Or, to put it the other way around, language was not primarily a medium of perceived reality but an order of reality itself. Accordingly, her ties to the Emersonian tradition (to Walt Whitman as well as to Adam and Eve) are based less on a rhetoric of seeing than of naming.²⁵ Since the familiar names hide the things they name instead of bringing them to consciousness, there is a constant need for new ways of linguistic representation. That this new language and manner of composition also amounted to a new way of seeing, to a reconstruction of the eye, takes nothing away from the fact that in the texture of Stein’s writings sight is not privileged. Perhaps one can say that it was precisely because she learned so much from the visual art of modernist painting that she regarded the visually concrete image as “too much appeal to the eye,” as an incomplete realization of the potentialities of her own medium: language. Although she saw her methods of writing as analogous to those of Cubist painting, she did not write to paint, even though she also said on one occasion that she wrote with her eyes.

She learned from Cézanne “that in composition one thing is as important as another thing.” This principle of equal emphasis could easily be transferred from composition to the structure of the sentence, or to the conventional classification of words or word groups according to their semantic weight or importance. If Pound used Fenollosa to develop the concept of a more immediate and original language that would grasp the relation between things as a fusion of image and action (or of image *as* action), Stein seems closer to William James’s plea to dissolve the rigidities of English grammar in order to give more immediate expression to the relational complexity between mind and world: “We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*. Yet we do not: so inveterate has our habit become of recognizing the existence of the substantive parts alone, that language almost refuses to lend itself to any other use.”²⁶

Like Pound, Stein was obsessed with a world in motion and with “language as a living, moving and acting entity,” but her distaste of what she must have considered

as the descriptively visual was so intense that she developed structures of movement and relation out of the “dense materiality” of the medium itself. “Repetition, variation, permutation, the minuscule transfer of a given word from one syntactical slot to another, one part of speech to another,” writes Marjorie Perloff about Stein’s early style, this “creates a compositional field that remains in constant motion that prevents closure from taking place.”²⁷ In her portraits of “Matisse” and “Picasso” as well as in *The Making of Americans* she works with such linguistic structures of repetition in variation. This was meant to bring out the inner quality of the character portrayed in rhythms of essential sameness in difference, thus creating a dynamic-form-in-motion.

In *Tender Buttons* Stein is done with the structures of repetition. She shifts her attention from verb and pronoun to the noun and to the value of the individual word: its material density of sound and suggestiveness. The texts of *Tender Buttons* create an aura of connotative richness without creating a consistent plane of correlated meaning – yet also without being able to create words without any meaning. The title, *Tender Buttons*, associates the household sphere of women but also has erotic and self-referential connotations.²⁸ Recent feminist readings have seen consistency only in the text’s systematic subversion of the logocentric principle, the liberation of words from the burden of having to make sense. “Act so that there is no use in a centre,” “. . . the teasing is tender and trying and thoughtful.” *Tender Buttons* enacts its sexual/textual tease in several ways: on the one hand, the text is full of allusions to the male and female sexual organs; on the other, it emphasizes – by its playful oscillation between sense and nonsense – its own linguistic “body-ness.”

Therefore one might argue that the text deconstructs the modernist dominance of the “eye” together with its logocentric structures, but it may be useful to remember that *Tender Buttons* issued, at least in part, from acts of visual perception. About the first part, “Objects,” Stein writes: “I used to take objects on a table, like a tumbler or any kind of object and try to get the picture of it clear and separate in my mind and create a word relationship between the word and the thing seen.”²⁹ Knowing by rediscovering the value of individual words was only another attempt at finding a new language of perception. To see things in a new way (to see them “really”) meant to radically separate perception from memory, to watch out “that looking was not confusing itself with remembering.” The culturally acquired system of language makes us recognize beforehand what we only believe to see but actually don’t because we know it by name before we see it. Therefore – and this is the logic of Stein’s language experiments – new words have to replace the known names so that seeing becomes possible again in/through writing. In this sense, Stein indeed writes as much with her eyes as she sees with her writing. Yet not on the basis of resemblance (the mirror image of mimesis) but of metonymic difference: “a blind glass,” “not unordered in not resembling.”

Although William Carlos Williams is undoubtedly indebted to Imagism and Pound’s concept of the image, he also acknowledged an affinity between his own work and Stein’s project of re-naming which, like his, aimed at a reconstruction of perception through a radical reconstruction of language. “Stein” – he wrote in his essay “A 1 Pound Stein” – “has gone systematically to work smashing every connotation

that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean . . . It can't be helped that the whole house has to come down . . . And it's got to come down because it has to be built."³⁰ The extensive metaphor of building may be an echo of Emerson for whom building one's own world and naming it were related actions. In the case of Williams, rebuilding the world in and through language is part of a "constructivist aesthetics," yet also a linguistic re-visioning of the familiar objects of common experience. What "stands eternally in the way of really good writing is . . . the virtual impossibility of lifting to the imagination those things which lie under the direct scrutiny of the senses, close to the nose."³¹ The poem thus exists in close sensuous relation to the world, not as its replica but as its revealed essence, its true Real. "The same things exist, but in a different condition when energized by the imagination . . . It is the imagination on which reality rides."³² Therefore writing, for Williams, is an "act of realization": the objects re-perceived through language reveal their dynamic essence, their true being, in their poetic form.

The famous poem on the red wheelbarrow is a simple and obvious example of such a poetics of realization – of a concretely visualized object that, at the same time, points toward its linguistic made-ness. This is apparent not only in the opening line but also in the way the words are arranged on the page so that they are individually isolated and yet work on each other. Still, the "so much depends" would remain an empty gesture if it would be a purely self-referential one. It draws the eye's attention (caringly, lovingly) to an object of everyday experience – much as it points to the love and care that went into the linguistic construction of it. "So much depends upon the red wheelbarrow," Charles Altieri writes in an illuminating analysis, "because so much depends on understanding what is at stake in the dual attributes of that 'so much depends': the mind's manifestation of an abiding principle of care . . . and the mind's becoming itself virtually tactile, in its efforts to compose the world so that those cares can reside in actual phenomena."³³

There is nevertheless a deep consciousness of loss in Williams, a yearning for the "cries of wonder let out by Columbus's men on seeing the new world actually."³⁴ Williams documented his "magnificent wish" for the New in his alternative history of America, *In the American Grain* – a history mostly of the failure to adequately respond to the challenge of the new, and its timid replacement by familiar and imported patterns of thought and language. Yet if Williams's history is a record of lost origin, it is also a record of its latent presence, of the New as the essentially Real. Williams's "realizations" thus rediscover and recapture the lost presence of the real in the newness of its linguistic (re)construction.

Although Williams's concept of the real *as* the new seems to be shaped by naming *and* by seeing, it is also apparent that "seeing" alone is never quite enough. The failure of the white settlers in America was not a failure of sight but of touch: the fear to bodily contact, merge, commingle in the concrete here and now. To see with touch or touching care and attention, through a medium at once tactile, dynamic, and visual – this is part of a redemptive vision of immanence in which "eye" is more than sight, and the act of mind rooted in the sensuous awareness of a world of objects.

Williams's insistence not only on the concretely visual and sensuous but also on the raw energy of the spoken word, the immediacy, reality and originality of common speech as resource in the making of the new, points to the continuing importance of the vernacular in American literary modernism.³⁵ Of course, the vernacular has had a regenerative function in all literatures, but it played a special role in America where it served to underline the claim of democratic difference from elitist European notions and practices of culture. Emerson's delight in the language of the street ("Cut these words and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive, they walk and run . . .") is the essence of Whitman's "language experiment" as documented not only in *Leaves of Grass* but in his notes on "American Slang" and his "American Primer" – the records of his enthusiastic exploration of the natural dynamics of American speech. In fact, grasping the authenticity of common speech and translating oral tradition into written text has been one of the main sources of innovation in American literature throughout the nineteenth century until the present. (The vernacular has thus been one of the roads of cultural integration that led from the regional, social, ethnic, and racial margins into a constantly changing "mainstream.") It is therefore quite logical that Hemingway saw in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* the beginning of American modernism. In his language experiment, Twain had made use of several local dialects and traditions of story telling (black and white). Hemingway not only drew on him to create the spoken effect of his precise and laconic prose style but also on Pound's strategies of "instantaneous perception" and on Stein's abstract patterns of speech through which, as she believed, a person revealed his "bottom nature." (Oddly enough, Richard Wright believed the speech patterns of "Melanctha" to be the most precise representation of "black speech" in American literature so far, and, in his *Lawd Today* has one of his characters connect the "non-sense"-prose of Gertrude Stein with the vernacular of Cab Calloway.³⁶)

In all of these cases, the fascination with common speech is a fascination with origin, the "primitive" energy of the American language. It runs parallel to Pound's obsession with Vorticism and its "instantaneous perception . . . such as savages and wild animals have of the necessities and dangers of the forest," or with Williams's search for the anarchic sources of the creative imagination. In his cultural critique *In the American Grain*, it is the original voice of the American continent – savage, Indian, and female – that he tries to recover. In the last poem of *Spring and All*, he addresses the imagination famously, perhaps notoriously, as "rich in savagery – / Arab / Indian / dark woman." That the imagination is somehow not-white and embodied in the ethnic and racial Other becomes apparent in Williams's almost envious description of black speech: "The relief is never ending, never failing. It is water from a spring to talk to him – it is a quality. I wish I might write a book of his improvisations in slang," he says of one of his black acquaintances³⁷ – while the texts, like many texts of this period, attempt to emulate or to adopt the anarchic freedom and physical concreteness of "primitive" expression.

To be sure, the discovery and appropriation of the "primitive" is essential to all modernism(s) and at the same time its most problematic and most controversial aspect.

But it is equally obvious that the avant-garde's putting on the mask of the primitive had to have completely different implications in the US where a long history of slavery, racism and racial confrontation had already created a cultural tradition of racial mimicry. The attempt of American modernists to help create a culture that went beyond the cultural tradition of the Anglo-Saxon and to re-conceive the United States "as something other than a white nation"³⁸ made confusions between the fantasied image of primitive life, the culturally established stereotype and the actually existing Other inevitable. Although important books of the period construct an alternative beginning for this new multiracial America by merging the white with the savage Indian spirit of the continent, more recent studies insist that most American modernists re-invented themselves by imagining themselves as black.³⁹

In his admirable and eye-opening book *The Dialect of Modernism*, Michael North argues that this is indeed what American modernism is all about: a white masquerade in blackface, a living off black culture without acknowledgment of debt. Since "blackness" was a white invention and answered to the need of the white artistic imagination, the gap between blacks as objects of white fantasy and the reality of their actual existence was unbridgeable. This paradox marks the Harlem Renaissance – the first (and short) flowering of African-American literature and art in the 1920s and early 1930s. It thrived as much on white desires for the primitive as on the hope of black artists to be able to inscribe themselves – via the aesthetic appreciation of the "primitive" in modernism – into a shared American culture. That both projections were linked but not at all compatible became manifest in the thirties when, with the beginning of the economic crisis, white interest for the black faded together with the Harlem Renaissance and the experimental phase of American modernism.

And yet, if modernism and the white stereotyping of the "primitive" are two sides of the same coin, can there not also be a modernism that is *not* white? The New Critics had, for a long time, denied the Harlem Renaissance the status of the "modern" (and thus also of the aesthetically relevant). But even black critics, for different reasons, saw black artistic expression as separate from the modernist tradition. For if modernism expressed its difference by blacking up, blackness expressing itself in white forms could only be a modernism turned inside out – resulting, at best, in an aesthetic reassertion of white literary conventions or, at worst, in a duplication of white impersonations of blackness. Did not Alain Locke's call for the creation of a modern American Negro art inevitably lead toward an art of imitation?

In his *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, Houston Baker responded to such condescension by placing the "Harlem Renaissance" within a larger movement of black "Renaissancism" – by which he meant the "ever-present folk or vernacular drive" inherent in all African-American art as a subversive counter-modernism that answered white mastery of form with the black deformation of mastery.⁴⁰ However, in order to do this, George Hutchinson has argued in a somewhat different interpretation of the Harlem Renaissance, Baker had to ignore that subversion is only half the story; the other is a story of attempted participation. Indeed, Claude McKay's ragtime player who "beats barbaric beauty out of the white frame" of his piano surely expresses his

bitterness about the pressure of producing art on white conditions; but also readiness to use such conditions creatively in order to express a sense of beauty that was surely his own.

In his search for new forms of poetic expression, Langston Hughes made use of Whitman, to whose project of a democratic celebration of the ordinary and vernacular he gave a distinctly African-American voice. Williams's development toward a new simplicity of form had been the result of much linguistic experimentation based on common speech ("straight from the mouths of Polish mothers"). Hughes saw himself as the poet of the "low-down folks" who were not afraid to identify themselves with their cultural heritage: he explored this "low" vernacular material – from the puns of colloquial speech, to the ritualized language games of the urban ghettos, to linguistic equivalences of Blues, Jazz, Be-Bop and Boogie Woogie – always with the purpose of creating a written literature of orality in which black experience could express yet also recognize itself. In a comparable way, Jean Toomer translated the rich oral tradition of the black South into the formal and linguistic complexities of the modernist text (in *Cane*); just as Zora Neale Hurston, with *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, created an oral written text, i.e., a text that constructs its oral quality through subtle innovations of narrative technique. Formal achievements such as these constitute a black tradition of modernism that includes the work of Ralph Ellison and culminates in Toni Morrison's.

Are there then two American modernisms, one black, the other white? Or is there only *one* in black and white? I am tempted to say "yes" to both questions since, on the one hand, the differences in experience, tradition, and development are so obvious that they cannot be ignored. Yet on the other, the gaps and distances have never been too great for exchange and dialogue – even under the unequal conditions created by racial discrimination. Therefore the ethnic differences and antagonistic interactions of American cultural history add to the innovative potential of an American modernism that in its various manifestations conceives of the new in the name of buried origins and, as part of a tradition of the new, understands even its linguistic revolutions as re-discoveries of its diverse cultural heritage.

NOTES

1 From a long list of relevant titles, I mention only a few: Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism: 1890–1930* (New York: Pelican, 1976); Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music and Painting in Europe 1900–1916* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernism* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Marianne DeKoven, *Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of*

Modernism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Bonnie K. Scott (ed.), *The Gender of Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Cultures and the Origins of*

- Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 2 Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Macmillan, 1995); Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick (eds.), *Modernity and the Text* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
 - 3 That these three terms are closely connected (and are therefore often used synonymously) comes as no surprise since they are different aspects of the same context of experience – a context that Marshall Berman has evoked precisely and concretely in his *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982).
 - 4 The incorporation of the “primitive” belongs to the fundamental strategies of literary and artistic modernism: “The avantgarde rejects European [and American] society, and thus enjoys the freedom of living outside the law, while simultaneously savoring connection to something more authentic found in Africa” [or in New Mexico or in Harlem]. North, *The Dialect of Modernism*, p. 67.
 - 5 “Gertrude Stein always speaks of America as being now the oldest country in the world because by the methods of the civil war and the commercial conceptions that followed it America created the twentieth century, and since all the other countries are now either living or commencing to be living a twentieth century life, America having begun the creation of the twentieth century in the sixties of the nineteenth century is now the oldest country in the world.” Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1960), p. 78; George Santayana, “Marginal Notes on Civilization in the United States,” in *The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays by George Santayana*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 135.
 - 6 In this respect it is interesting to compare *A Homemade World* (New York: William Morrow, 1975) with Kenner’s earlier treatment of transatlantic modernism, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) – which de-emphasizes the American dimension, although one could of course argue that Pound’s world, too, was home- and self-made. For a view of American art as an individual and traditionless enterprise, see Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959).
 - 7 In Katja Götde et al. (eds.), *Gardening With Brains: Eine Anthologie New Yorker Avantgarde-Zeitschriften der 1910–1920er Jahre* (Berlin: John F. Kennedy Institut, 1996), p. 265.
 - 8 David A. Hollinger, “The Knower and the Artificer,” *American Quarterly* 39 (1) (Special Issue: “Modernist Culture in America”): 37–55, 1987.
 - 9 “But for the artist, for Sheeler as an artist, it is in the shape of the thing that the essence lies.” William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954), p. 233.
 - 10 Quoted in Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler, Artist in the American Tradition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938), p. 143.
 - 11 Agee refers not only to the democratic dignity of common people and common objects but to reality as “pure existence,” which – as with Whitman – is cosmic and democratic.
 - 12 Williams, “The American Background,” *Selected Essays*, p. 143. In “Against the Weather,” Williams repeats the argument but with a different emphasis: “A life that is here and now is timeless. That is the universal I am seeking: to embody that in a work of art, a new world that is always ‘real.’” (“Against the Weather: A Study of the Artist,” 1939, *Selected Essays*, pp. 196–218, here: p. 196). Charles Altieri calls this “a religious appropriation of Cézanne’s aesthetics” in *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 235.
 - 13 To be timeless, all creative expression has to be constantly abreast with change since “all things otherwise grow old and rot.” Therefore Williams embraces Jefferson’s notion – which Dewey also refers to – of a permanent revolution: “We should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, reaffirmed in a new mode. There has to be new poetry . . . [T]he altered structure of the inevitable revolution must be *in* the poem, in it. Made of it. It must shine in the structural body of it.” (“Against the Weather,” p. 217) The affinity

- of Williams's aesthetic convictions with the tenets of American pragmatism is striking. He mentions Dewey several times without further elaboration.
- 14 *In the American Grain* (1925) (New York: New Directions, 1956), n.p.
 - 15 John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task Before Us," *The Philosopher of the Common Man: Essays in Honor of John Dewey to Celebrate His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. S. Ratner (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 220–8.
 - 16 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), p. 48.
 - 17 Perloff, 1986, p. 171.
 - 18 Timothy Materer, *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 26.
 - 19 Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (New York: New Directions, 1960, reprint), p. 92.
 - 20 Pound, "Affirmations II. Vorticism," *New Age* 16 (January 14, 1915): 278.
 - 21 Ernest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1968 reprint (1936), p. 8.
 - 22 Max Nänni, *Ezra Pound: Poetics for an Electronic Age* (Bern: Francke, 1973), p. 76.
 - 25 "[T]he poet is the Namer or Language-maker, naming things sometimes after their appearance, sometimes after their essence, and giving to every one its own name and not another's," Emerson had written in "The Poet," *Essays*, pp. 456ff.
 - 26 William James, *Selected Writings*, ed. G.H. Bird (London: Dent, 1995), pp. 189ff. Cummings implements such a project in a poem like "Anyone lived in a pretty how town."
 - 27 Perloff, Marjorie. *Poetic Licence: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 153.
 - 28 The tender nipples of women's breasts. And if we read "tender" not as adjective but as noun – "something that may be offered in payment" – then the title can also be understood as inviting the reader to engage in a sensuous and playful exchange.
 - 29 Gertrude Stein, "Transatlantic Interview," in B.K. Scott (ed.), *The Gender of Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 509.
 - 30 William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954), pp. 163f.
 - 31 Williams, 1954, p. 11.
 - 32 William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 138.
 - 33 Charles Altieri, 1989, p. 233.
 - 34 Williams, 1954, p. 144.
 - 35 See Sieglinde Lemke, "The Enigma of the Vernacular" (unpubl. Habilitationsschrift, FU-Berlin, 2002); also my essay "'A Clean Wind through the Chaff of Truth' – William Carlos Williams as Critic," in 'The Poet as Critic', Special Number, ed. Cristina Giorcelli, *Litterature d'America*, XIX–XX, nn. 83–4 (1999/2000) [publ. 2002]: 81–101.
 - 36 Richard Wright, *Lawd Today* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), p. 150.
 - 37 *In the American Grain*, 210–11.
 - 38 George Huntington, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 446.
 - 39 Apart from Michael North's study see for instance Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel New York in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995) and Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
 - 40 Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) esp. pp. 91ff.

West, West, West

Martha Viehmann

Red rock buttes, golden sunsets, prairies that stretch to the horizon, intrepid explorers and pioneers, lone men with guns, half-naked men on horseback with feather head-dresses . . . Images of the American West and western Americans, Indian and white, are easy to conjure up; they come to us through the simplifications of pop culture but also in not-necessarily-pop art, literature, and history. Even nuanced evocations of the West refer to the powerful environment, the history of conquering it and colonizing its indigenous peoples, and the strong associations between the western US and American values such as freedom and self-reliance. The images are especially powerful because we have come to accept them as essential to the stories. As Leslie Fiedler put it in *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968): “Tales set in the West” without Indian characters “seem . . . not quite Westerns” (p. 24); likewise, we assume westerns always occur in rugged wilderness areas, not cities or suburbs. In recent decades, the New Western History and the exploding of the American literary canon transformed our views of the significant narratives and themes in US history and literature, and with that came a reassessment of literature of the West and its relationship to the people and history of the region and the nation. An aim of the reassessment has been to identify images that can be as compelling as those passed on in the formula westerns but that reflect a broader array of experiences in and responses to the West. Yet to understand where current literary studies are (or should be) going, we must review the ways in which the western region and values we associate with it were first recognized as cultural forces.

The West and the Nation in Literary History

Attention to the West as a site of meaning for the nation is readily traced to Frederick Jackson Turner’s 1893 address “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” As a historian, Turner focused on change over time, which helps us understand that where the West *is* depends on when and where one looks for it. He described

the history of the US as a succession of frontiers that differed in character because of time, geography, and economics, yet his essay also established an ahistorical mythology. Turner proposed that Americans look to the West for a unifying national history that would finally heal the sectional wounds of the Civil War. The common history he proposed was the transformation of Europeans into Americans through contact with the environment and the original Indian inhabitants. It makes of US history a tale of pioneering white men with Indians playing supporting roles: "In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race." In the language of 1893, this racial mixture included English, German, and other European nationalities, not the African-Americans, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, Chinese and other Asian immigrants, and Native Americans who also contributed to the history and the region. His essay asserts that slavery is less important than the environment in shaping who we are, therefore subordinating race to region. It ignores forced relocations (a fate shared by enslaved Africans and African-Americans, American Indians, Chinese immigrants, Mexican citizens, and, decades after Turner wrote his essay, Mexican-Americans and Japanese-Americans), and it enshrines immigration from Europe and westward migration as the foundation of American history. Turner's descriptions also make clear that these ideal Americans, shaped through contact with and transformation of the "wilderness," are men. In this frontier myth, blacks, Latinos, and Asians are absent, women are superfluous, and Indians make the trails that traders follow, fight the loss of their territory – thereby promoting a national identity based in Indian fighting – and conveniently pass away to become mere traces on what Turner called the "palimpsest" of US history. For Turner, the frontier is significant in *history*; its time has passed but the moment of the individual's encounter with a new land remains the quintessential element of that American history.

Scholars interested in the significance of the West or of the frontier in US culture draw directly or indirectly on Turner's work, especially in the seminal endeavors of the twentieth century. In this scholarship, we see evidence that Turner's emphasis on the encounter with the landscape as a defining characteristic of American and western experience remains potent. It lies, for example, behind Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950). Smith examined a series of myths of the American West, from Manifest Destiny (and its precursors), to the western hero (Cooper's Leatherstocking or Natty Bumppo and variations), to the image of the West as a garden. Other works in American Studies, the interdisciplinary examination of American culture, continue the emphasis on the environment or on contact between the migrating Europeans and the Native peoples they encounter. While R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam* (1955) is not explicitly about the West, his characterization of the American hero as a self-reliant "individual emancipated from history . . . family and race" (p. 5) describes the western hero well and parallels Turner's emphasis on the individual in relationship to the environment stripped of all trappings of the past and remade into something new – the American. The West imagined as the ultimate land of opportunity, promoting "perennial rebirth" (Turner), fits Lewis's analysis of the American myth. In terms of intellectual history, a myth is neither a religious tale

nor a falsehood but a powerful generalized story line. These ideas about the nature of the West and national identity have been challenged (Turner's western history leaves out too much; analysis in terms of myths and symbols strays too far from actual history), yet myths of the West persist in popular culture, evident in the twenty-first-century commemorations of the Lewis and Clark expedition and other celebrations of the West. Likewise, our popular images of American ideals, in films for example, continue to embody characteristics first made familiar in westerns. Our heroes are no longer necessarily white or male (think Sigourney Weaver and Will Smith fighting aliens in *Aliens* and *Independence Day*), but they still exhibit independence, resistance to authority, freedom from individual history, practical inventiveness, and suspicion of expertise and education. These are qualities that Turner associates with the frontier, that heroes of popular westerns embody, and that Lewis, to a lesser degree, uncovers in one strain of American intellectual history.

The myth of the frontier so captivated Richard Slotkin that he devoted three huge texts to detailed analyses of three centuries of cultural expression about the transplantation of Europeans into the "wilderness," the ensuing conflict, and the ideology of progress arising out of that conquest. In *Regeneration through Violence* (1973), *The Fatal Environment* (1985), and *Gunfighter Nation* (1992), Slotkin explores literary, political, historical, and cultural sources such as captivity narratives, dime novels, speeches, wild west shows, western movies, race riots, and the rhetoric of the Vietnam War to show how the mythologized history of "the conquest of the wilderness and the subjugation or displacement of the Native Americans . . . have been the means to our achievement of a national identity" (Slotkin, 1992: 10). The broad historical scope and wide range of texts that Slotkin includes reflect the elasticity of the term "western literature." Works that, like Turner, connect the themes of history or the plots of literature that we most identify with the West to the story of national identity make it difficult to ascertain a distinctive regional tradition. The irony here is that the West is most worthy of attention when it illuminates the nation, but that leaves us without a sense of a distinctive West.

Feminist analyses of the encounters with the land were developed by Annette Kolodny, whose work remains influential. In *The Lay of the Land* (1975), she assesses the writing of white men, and she considers white women's writing in *The Land before Her* (1984). Kolodny wrote her first book because she was struck by the frequency with which Euro-American men imagined the land as a woman, figured as virgin, lover, or mother. *The Lay of the Land* explores the American pastoral, a literary tradition "in which metaphor and the patterns of daily activity" merge in the form of a history of intimate relationships with the landscape that is not found in the European pastoral vision (Kolodny, 1975: 7, 9). Using psychology and psychohistory, Kolodny concludes that the metaphor of "land-as-woman" has an archetypal aspect and functioned in the unconscious to help European men adapt to new environments. Her analysis stresses that American literature prior to 1970 frequently followed a plot of psychosexual male development, in which the comfort of the maternal embrace of the land had to be rejected in order for the protagonist "to experience the self as independent, assertive, and sexually active" (p. 153). Yet the longing for union with the land, the desire for

wilderness, remains paramount. Cooper's Leatherstocking or Natty Bumppo is the primary example of the figure who never frees himself from the land's maternal embrace, so he remains in "pastoral harmony" while the Euro-American community of settlers, whom he frequently protects, transforms the landscape and their relationship to it. While Turner is nostalgic about the lost frontier, Kolodny sees American transformations of the land as tragic, conveyed in abundant imagery of the land as despoiled, a raped or violated mother. Kolodny proposes that the metaphor of the land-as-woman must adapt to our current despoiled environment, where we needn't have to choose between Natty Bumppo's rejection of women for his love of the land and an identity that requires violation of the wilderness. The conscious process of manipulating language to create symbols gives Kolodny hope that new metaphors can transform American relationships to the landscape.

Her second book examines women's writing to explore the "fantasy and experience" of the frontier from 1630 to 1860 (a time period similar to Slotkin's first book, *Regeneration through Violence*). Drawing on private letters and diaries as well as published writings such as captivity narratives and sentimental novels, Kolodny explores how Euro-American women, like their men, "dreamed of transforming the wilderness." Rather than the "psychosexual dramas" of conquest enacted in men's writing, westering women stressed the recurring image of the garden, an extension of the home (Kolodny, 1984: xii–xiii). Sentimental frontier novels of the mid-nineteenth century, now largely forgotten, emphasized western homesteads as havens from the ills of northern cities or the immoral feudal structures of southern plantations. These novels of western relocation ignored historical realities – deprivation, isolation, and speculators' control of lands – that challenged the notion of women achieving a place in the West. Kolodny concludes that these novels supplant the image of the isolated American Adam with images of American Eves who share the paradise projected in the literary West. But these figures never took hold of the American imagination, and died away about 1860. Those few women who were able to feel at home in the wilderness, like Mary Jemison, a captive who was adopted and lived contentedly as a Seneca for the rest of her life, did not attain mythic status like the historical Daniel Boone or the literary Natty Bumppo, for, according to Kolodny, they do not match American ideals of women's relationships with the land. Through this era, women and wilderness remain antithetical. Kolodny's and Slotkin's works remind us of the importance of the land in Euro-American conceptions of our nation, and their concern for the effects of violence against people and the land lay the groundwork for the development of another interdisciplinary approach, Ecocriticism, examined in chapter 35 of this volume.

Defining Western Literature

The broad interdisciplinary approaches of Smith, Slotkin, and Kolodny pay little attention to the writing most people think of when they hear the term "western," the popular novels I evoked in opening the essay. In fact, discussion of what literature counts as

western, what western writing counts as literature, what places count as the West, and what people count as westerners is important in the field. There are no correct answers, and as in the study of American literature, the embrace of multiculturalism results in the acceptance of numerous story lines rather than a unifying narrative of literary history. The field of western literary studies has had to accept diverse definitions from its earliest days as a recognized subset of US literature. The Western Literature Association began publishing its journal, *Western American Literature*, in 1966, at a time when the study of popular culture was growing. So the earliest issues of the journal include essays about cowboy novels and about literary authors such as Willa Cather, Mark Twain, and D.H. Lawrence. In order to call attention to the literary value of western writing and to promote awareness of the rich variety of the literature, the Western Literature Association undertook the compilation of an encyclopedic reference book, *A Literary History of the American West* (1986), edited by Thomas Lyon, one of the leading scholars in the field. It contains articles on better-known individual authors such as Hamlin Garland and Bret Harte, as well as entries on specific western areas (the Midwest, the Rocky Mountains) and ethnic groups, including African-American, Mexican-American, Native American, and Scandinavian immigrant authors. Now out of print, this reference work has been supplemented by *Updating the Literary West* (Rosowski et al., 1997), which contains articles on new authors and subgenres (such as westerns written by American Indians, African-Americans, and Europeans) and updates on authors who receive significant scholarly attention, such as Cather, Hamlin Garland, and Wallace Stegner. This reference work provides useful overviews of the field in general, specific authors and categories of literature, and the literature of specific regions within the West. It also has a section devoted to the popular western. Interestingly, best-selling authors Cormac McCarthy and Larry McMurtry rate individual chapters in their respective regions, the southwest and Texas. In fact, one of the things that keep the definitions in western literature so lively is that someone is always crossing borders.

Two works that strove to define the “western” used both literary and popular texts to build their definitions. Both include references to Cooper’s Leatherstocking novels, books that straddle the divide between the popular and the literary. John Cawelti’s *The Six-Gun Mystique* (c. 1971) helped make the emerging field of popular culture studies respectable; it offers an approach to the study of western films and novels regardless of questions of artistic quality, stressing cultural significance. His extended essay, especially part five, describes and analyzes the basic components of westerns. The setting is generally in an open space, like the plains or the desert, which intensifies the conflict. The characters in conflict are townspeople or women, representing “civilization,” and threatening Indians or outlaws that serve as “savage” elements, while the hero moves freely in the harsh environment (he has a horse) and can enforce the law when necessary (he uses his six-gun only when forced to by his adversary). Finally, Cawelti asserts that with all its variations, the formulaic action of the western is some kind of flight and pursuit that emphasize the threat the “savages” pose to “civilization.” Cawelti also notes that from the first westerns of Cooper, some stories have incorporated images of noble Indians along with savage ones. While we celebrate the defeat of

the latter, the honorable and courageous Indians, who are akin to the hero, inspire nostalgia or mourning when they die, which they inevitably do. The more complex western heroes, standing between the opposing forces of "civilization" and "savagery," are also able to embody the more admirable qualities associated with Indians and so call attention to the less noble qualities of civilization. Finally, Cawelti explores the function of the western, which is largely to affirm the American value of success while still leaving room for the doubts and ambiguities that arise from that which is lost in the name of progress, including the independence of the hero, the freedom of the wide open spaces, and the "good" Indians associated with both of these. Cawelti's *Six-Gun Mystique* remains an important book because it at once simplifies the western into an identifiable set of characteristics while illuminating the evolution, variety, and levels of complexity in western films and novels.

Cawelti's book includes significant attention to literary criticism and critical approaches to the western. Some may find the first three sections especially hard going, since the schools of criticism that were new around 1970 have been superseded by other critical approaches. Leslie Fiedler's *Return of the Vanishing American*, free of footnotes and scholarly debates, provides a more accessible exploration of the development of the western as a distinct genre. Fiedler begins with Cooper and concludes with the revival of serious western novels in the mid-twentieth century, including satirical ones such as Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man*. He predicts that new westerns will find new antagonistic others to explore, forecasting the emergence of new western novels that some may not find "western" because the formula becomes more attenuated. Fiedler is more focused on writings of literary quality than Cawelti, but both, like Smith, Slotkin, and Kolodny, begin with Cooper, whose novels are important in establishing Euro-America's views of nature, Natives, and gender. Unlike Turner's emphasis on the land itself, Fiedler stresses the importance of the conflict with the Indian other. Cawelti merges the two, seeing both setting and the antagonist-as-other as central elements of the western formula. Cawelti also notes that Indians are more likely to function as aspects of the setting than as developed characters, acknowledging the denial of Native American subjectivity that is only implicit in Turner's Frontier Thesis.

One of the interesting books about the western since Fiedler's and Cawelti's important codifications of the genre is Jane Tompkins's *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992). Drawing on her earlier work in reader-response criticism and her study of the effects of sentimental literature (*Sensational Designs*), Tompkins explores why the western is appealing, acknowledging her own recently found passion for what is traditionally considered a man's (or boy's) genre. Her focus on elements of westerns in effect extends Cawelti's list of the components of the western formula, and like him she examines both films and novels. She focuses on twentieth-century works exclusively, and especially the popular westerns like Louis L'Amour novels and John Wayne movies. Tompkins adds to setting (she calls it "landscape") the following elements: death, women, language, horses, and cattle. In her introduction she describes her "surprise" in realizing that Indians would not have a significant place in her exploration of the imaginative world of the western (Tompkins, 1993: 7). Like Cawelti, she noticed

that Indians do not function as “characters” but rather as “props, bits of local color, textural effects” (p. 8). That Indian actors were typically extras while whites played the leading Indian roles in western movies intensified her dismay (9). Tompkins offers some startlingly new insights. For example, she locates the western as a genre created in reaction to women’s growing power as Christian social reformers. The western settings (rather than the frontiers of Cooper) allow for an environment largely free of women but rife with prostitution, gambling, and alcohol, the social ills targeted by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Western formulas, in Tompkins’s view, assert masculine identity by glorifying encounters with death, valorizing action over words, utilizing landscapes that convey the austere power the hero must embody, and promoting endurance by showing heroes who never wince in pain despite mountains of suffering. The second half of her book consists of case studies of Buffalo Bill and three especially powerful western novels, *The Virginian* and one work each by Zane Grey and Louis L’Amour. The epilogue of *West of Everything* reflects on the justification of violence, a story retold in every western novel and film. By comparing the way that villains push the hero to the brink, requiring him to respond with violence (to the delight of innocent bystanders and the audience alike), to the way that academics turn intellectual disagreements into showdowns, Tompkins concludes that morally justified acts of violence, though usually bloodless, are very much a part of US culture and everyday experience.

Tompkins arrives at her understanding of the popular western by placing these works into a new context, using her knowledge of nineteenth-century women’s literature and history to draw attention to the absence of women and the invisibility of subjectivities other than the white male heroes’. Much of the scholarship on western literature following the exploding of the American literary canon emphasized new or newly recognized works. For example, Richard Etulain in *Telling Western Stories: From Buffalo Bill to Larry McMurtry* (1999) opens up definitions of stories by recognizing stage performances (the Wild West) and works of history (Patricia Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest*) as examples of stories about the West. He also discusses relatively recent novels by Leslie Silko and Larry McMurtry. Etulain’s thesis is that since the 1960s, it has become possible to tell new stories in new ways that replace the black hat and white hat westerns with “gray stories.” He implicitly embraces progress by emphasizing the break from the past, yet Etulain also affirms the continuing popularity of traditional western stories, such as Robert Utley’s biography of Billy the Kid and McMurtry’s *Lonesome Dove* (a traditional yet gray story). While acknowledging room for diversity, Etulain sides with the enduring if now less romanticized popular western. As we shall see, other scholars question the newness of this sort of analysis.

A more original approach comes from scholars who write about literature while engaging history, using historical contexts and critiques of western history to shed light on literary texts. Two examples of this approach are Krista Comer’s *Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women’s Writing* (1999), which continues Annette Kolodny’s project of writing women into western spaces by analyzing new women’s writing that challenges our images of the landscape; and William

Handley's *Marriage, Violence, and the Nation in the American Literary West* (2002), which provides new insight into frequently discussed works, such as *The Virginian* and novels by Cather and Stegner. Handley uncovers the shared concern with domesticity and violence in these seemingly divergent works, giving us new ways to consider the role of gender tensions in western literature.

Another work that uses a different context to provide a fresh illumination is Nathaniel Lewis's *Unsettling the Literary West: Authenticity and Authorship* (2003). He recontextualizes western American literature by paying attention to how authors interacted with audiences in the eastern US and England and how they responded to earlier writers. Lewis reminds readers that western writing, from the 1830s to today, is committed to realism. It is "western" to the extent that the authors have real western experiences that allow them to transcribe western places directly into their texts. However, according to Lewis, the focus on realism makes the author little more than a transcriber, which undermines the literary quality of the work. So early writers of the West like James Hall and Timothy Flint remained obscure, while Cooper, who never ventured west of New York State, could use the power of his imagination to gain authorial command. Throughout, Lewis focuses on how "authenticity," which is always constructed, undermines the power of the authors and impacts how we read western literature – because we expect it to be real. He offers, for example, a new interpretation of Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home, Who'll Follow*, diverging from assumptions of the text's realism on which Annette Kolodny and others have based their interpretations. Lewis suggests that Kirkland was responding not to western male authors who omitted women from the region, but to the British tradition of the village sketch, exemplified by Frances Trollope's attack on frontier manners. He identifies Washington Irving as a major influence on Kirkland, who, like him, used authorial interventions to color her accounts (Irving used the pen name Geoffrey Crayon; academics and canonical authors alike enjoy puns). Lewis's book contains many other examples of fresh interpretations, always coming back to his theme of how the authenticity of the West is constructed and unstable. He shows that, from the beginning, images of the West have been separated from their reality, and western US authors have felt boxed in by their sense of the inauthenticity of previous accounts of the region. Repeatedly referencing the ironies of the constructed nature of what we have taken to be real, Lewis makes postmodern ideas seem deeply rooted in the literary history of the US West. In the final chapter, Lewis examines Native American literature from his outsider position as a non-Native academic. Here he is not interested in arguing that Indian authors have invented themselves as authentic, which is how the previous chapters treated nature writers like Mary Austin, Edward Abbey, and Terry Tempest Williams. He works with full awareness that Native American literature does not seem to fit with the other literature of the US West and that his outsider status makes even his attempt at analysis suspect. Lewis refuses to create a comfortable space here, even though Native American literature is so deeply entangled with authenticity. Instead he calls attention to the double bind non-Native readers of Native literature are in: to ignore the texts makes Indians disappear from western literary history; yet in reading them, non-Natives risk

imposing their (our) own cultural views upon them, such as the need to read them as authentic, despite ignorance of the Native cultures from which these works emerge. Lewis unsettles the typical narratives of western literary history and the position of the reader in search of the “real” in either western or Native American literatures.

Locating Ethnic Literatures in the West

By struggling to make space for Native American literature in the literary history of the US West while cautioning against the impulse to impose non-Native perspectives upon these works, Lewis makes a crucial move in changing the significant narratives, themes, and imagery that the West and its literatures contribute to ideas and stories about the nation. By shifting from the context of conquest to one of colonialism, he unsettles previously accepted notions about the relationship between Euro-Americans and Native Americans. His cautions about how outsiders read Native literature keep before readers the continuing ideological domination that is part of colonialism. In writing western history, literary or otherwise, other habits of thought are harder to break. Chronological structures for large-scale projects, such as Slotkin’s trilogy, continue to tell those histories in a pattern that moves from east to west, implicitly supporting the notion of progress (the progressive growth of the nation) and making migration a continuation of Euro-American immigration. Looking at contemporary literatures and western writing from specific regions helps readers and scholars escape the hold of historical narratives, furthering new conceptions of migration, frontiers, and relationships with the environment. Even so, the challenge of incorporating stories from people of color into analysis of literature of the US West remains. Additions of ethnic literature to surveys of western literature do not necessarily ease the sense of marginalization (they may be added without overhauling old views of the West and its literary history). Moreover, ethnicity and gender are more prominent than place in our readings of literature from marginalized groups. Even western writers of color, such as Oklahoma-born Ralph Ellison, and writing that clearly responds to the formula western, such as Ishmael Reed’s *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969), are not often read as western. Reed’s novel about the Loop Garoo Kid, “a cowboy so bad he made . . . the Pope cry” (Reed, 1969: 9), is saturated in references to westerns and to African-American literature. Just in the opening pages, Reed employs the rhetoric of exaggeration from the African-American tradition of playing the dozens and the frontier tradition of tall tales; in addition, he informs readers that the Kid is born with a caul over his face, which is a reference to Booker T. Washington’s aim to lift the veil of ignorance from free blacks and to Ellison’s novel, *Invisible Man*. Yet for years, the book was out of print, an orphan with no home in either western or African-American literary studies. To make the study of literature of the US West more richly multicultural, we need a firmer grasp of the literatures of the West by people of color. In the final section of this chapter, I will focus especially on Native American literatures with ties to the US West.

Given the popularity of western stories, it is no surprise that Native writers have drawn upon them. The first known novel by a Native writer features a gun-toting outlaw, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854) by Cherokee journalist and poet John Rollin Ridge, who was lured to California by the gold rush. All of Ridge's writing includes local topics, situating it firmly in the West, yet scholars of American Indian literature stress Cherokee and Indian aspects. From a Native perspective, Murieta's revenge against Anglos is variously read as a displacement of Ridge's anger at Euro-American injustices (Louis Owens, *Other Destinies*) or a fantasy of his desire for revenge against the anti-removal faction of Cherokees who murdered Ridge's father and other signers of the New Echota removal treaty (Jace Weaver: *That the People Might Live*). Later Native authors more overtly combine western color, formulas, and icons with representations of Native life and advocacy for Indian people. Examples include the romance *Cogewea the Halfblood* (1927) by Okanogan writer and migrant laborer Mourning Dove. A pivotal chapter in the novel takes place at a regional fair where Cogewea wins two racially segregated horse races and publicly argues with the white male judge to assert her right to claim both sides of her family, thereby challenging ideologies of racial purity. Cogewea also alternates between the "high falutin'" speech that proves her mastery of formal American English and an exaggerated western slang, challenging a divide between east and west (a theme embodied by her competing suitors). A play set in Indian Territory by Cherokee writer Lynn Riggs, *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1931), celebrates the land and probably portrays an interracial marriage. When Rogers and Hammerstein transformed Riggs's work into the musical *Oklahoma!*, they eliminated references to Indians and Indian Territory, repeating the kind of white-washing of the frontier that Turner's history of the West also enacted.

Growing up with these and other erasures of Indian presence, Native Americans have cheered on the white hero who kills the Indians in popular movies. Native authors therefore still contest Euro-American centered versions of the history of the US West and wrestle with the power of iconic western figures. Among the several novels and beautifully challenging poetry penned by Blackfeet/Gros Ventre writer James Welch are two historical novels told from Native perspectives. *Fools Crow* (1986) evocatively imagines the world of the Blackfeet just before the arrival of Euro-Americans, immersing readers into the nineteenth-century Pikuni world, while *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000) relates a completely new kind of story about a Lakota man who, abandoned by the Wild West and left behind in a French hospital, falls in love and settles into family life in Marseilles. Cherokee author Diane Glancy imaginatively recovers the voice of Sacagewea in *Stone Heart* (2003), telling a wholly new version of this familiar story, as Frank X. Walker, an African-American poet, was motivated to do for York in two cycles of poetry, *Buffalo Dance* (2003) and *When Winter Come: The Ascension of York* (2008). In addition to uncovering or inventing Native perspectives on familiar western topics, Native authors respond creatively to iconic figures of the West, such as Billy the Kid and John Wayne. Growing up in New Mexico, Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday heard many stories of Billy the Kid and developed a fascination with the outlaw. He published a series of poems and stories in 1971 and 1972 called

“The Strange and True Story of My Life with Billy the Kid” that he later incorporated into his second novel, *The Ancient Child* (1989). Like Indian movie-goers, Momaday is drawn to the heroic and epic quality of the outlaw who becomes a legend, and clearly expresses his admiration and sympathy for the Kid. But *The Ancient Child* also returns to a favorite theme of Momaday’s, the Kiowa story of the boy who becomes a bear. Momaday has written poems about, made drawings of, and discussed his personal ties to the bear; he included bear imagery in his Pulitzer Prize winning novel *House Made of Dawn* (1969) and retold the story of the bear-boy in his ground-breaking work *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) (Lisa Brooks discusses this work in more detail in chapter 8). *The Ancient Child* focuses on a Kiowa-Navajo teen, Grey, who comes of age and embraces her role as a medicine woman, and Locke Setman, a Kiowa artist who was adopted out of the tribe and begins a journey to recover his heritage. The ending is ambiguous, as Set’s attempt to recover his Kiowa heritage undermines his sense of self, but the novel suggests that the Kiowa stories and ideas about the bear are in fact more powerful and life-giving than the legends of Billy the Kid. Other Native writers also challenge images of epic heroism of white western men; both Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene) and Louise Erdrich (Anishinabe or Ojibway) strive to undermine the power of cowboy/outlaw heroes by showing Native responses to John Wayne. Describing the immensity of Wayne’s face on a drive-in movie screen, Erdrich concludes her poem “Dear John Wayne” with these lines: “How can we help but keep hearing his voice, / . . . “Come on, boys, we got them / where we want them” (*Jacklight*, 1983). In Alexie’s film *Smoke Signals* (1998), two Coeur d’Alene youths get back on the bus they are taking from Idaho to Arizona only to find two white men now occupying the seats they had temporarily vacated. Neither Thomas’s self-deprecating confusion, nor Victor’s tough “warrior” attitude convince the white men to move. The whites respond in a succinct parody of colonialism, declaring, “They’re ours now.” In response, Victor makes up a song about John Wayne’s teeth that humorously deflates the power of the quintessential western hero. The song reasserts Indian Power, to paraphrase the slogan on Thomas’s t-shirt, but recurring broadcasts of western movies on the TVs in Indians’ homes suggest how difficult it is to overturn the myths of conquest.

Contemporary Native American Literature and Criticism

Writing against the destructive imagery and ideologies of Euro-American centered depictions of the US West is only one aspect of western ethnic literatures. Regional and ethnic literatures are also written for the communities out of which they arise. This occurs not only in the creative writing but also in the literary criticism written by members of their respective ethnic groups. In Native American literary studies, this new form of critical analysis is called tribal literary nationalism, and it emphasizes the role of literature and criticism in supporting tribal community, activism, and sovereignty. Robert Warrior (Osage) first articulated the importance of indigenous-based scholarship in *Tribal Secrets* (1994). In his second book, *The People and the Word*

(2005), he rewrites Native literary history by focusing on an unbroken tradition of non-fiction prose that articulates and advocates for Native communities and can still inspire Native Americans today. His work places tribal people and their experiences at the center, decentering but not dismissing the exchanges and conflicts between Indians and whites. In *That the People Might Live* (1997), Jace Weaver (Cherokee) focuses on lesser-known writers to expand our knowledge of Native literary traditions and coins the term “communitism,” a combination of community and activism, to stress the ways writers serve the Indian audiences for whom they write. Two other scholars deepen the focus on indigenous perspectives using tribal experience and history to analyze and theorize about the literature: Creek or Muskogee writer Craig Womack in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999) and Cherokee scholar and author Daniel Heath Justice in *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History* (2006) focus on the literatures of their respective nations. *Red on Red* asserts a distinctive Creek literary history by connecting it to the history, government, and ongoing traditions that affirm Muskogean national identity or sovereignty. Womack’s project is at once critical, literary, and political. Justice also looks to tribal experience and history to develop a Cherokee-based approach to the work of Cherokee authors. Drawing on historical figures from the eighteenth century and the ways in which they urged their people to engage with settler-colonists, Justice establishes a paradigm for reading oral, historical, and literary Cherokee texts. Nanye’hi or Nancy Ward provides the model for the Beloved Path, a philosophy of accommodation and cooperation, while resistant strategies, or Chickamauga consciousness, are embodied in her contemporary, the War Chief Dragging Canoe or Tsiyu Gansini. Both of these leaders worked to preserve Cherokee nationhood and ensure the survival of their people. Justice’s work shows that the fruitful tension between the Beloved Path and Chickamauga consciousness is an essential aspect of Cherokee culture, identity, and literary traditions that endures today.

The scholarship of Warrior, Weaver, Womack, and Justice provides the clearest example of how Native American literature occupies what we might imagine as a separate territory from the literature typically identified with the US West. The imaginary spaces explored in the literatures may share geographic reference points but occupy different cultural territories. This is why the work of writers of color is so difficult to imagine as *western*. The bodies of work coexist but are not necessarily speaking to each other. Reading with care and an eye to revising older images of the West, we can start conversations that enrich our understanding of the region and the significance of the stories typically told about it. Susan Kollin does this by comparing A.B. Guthrie’s iconic Montana novel, *The Big Sky* (1947), with D’Arcy McNickle’s (Salish and Kootenai) earlier novel, *The Surrounded* (1936), which is also set in Montana on the Flathead Reservation. While Guthrie’s historical novel mourns the belatedness of those arriving in the West in the middle of the nineteenth century, after the real frontier is gone, McNickle’s contemporary portrayal of reservation life celebrates the revitalizing power of traditional Flathead beliefs, despite the novel’s tragic ending. Through McNickle’s work Kollin shows that the past serves as a source of strength and continuity, a much more optimistic vision than Guthrie’s model of the past as the site only of losses viewed

nostalgically. Likewise, we might look to other works by people of color to challenge popular western images. Asian-American literature provides stories of migration from a different direction, whose alternate histories and cultural backgrounds shape different narratives of immigration. The multi-generational accounts of coming to terms with the land give the work of contemporary California author and farmer David Mas Masumoto a rich sense of place, even though his books are typically categorized as food writing (see, for example, *Epitaph for a Peach*). In a brief essay about Japanese-American farmers and the bitter harvests of World War II relocation camps, quixotic weather that destroys crops, and widowhood, Masumoto reveals there is sweetness, too, identified in his title: "Belonging on the Land." His work situates ethnic experience in the West and uses laughter and sweet, fresh fruits to show how we can endure despite difficulties. Other works by minority writers that may enrich our visions of the West include the work of Pomo author and scholar Greg Sarris (*Grand Avenue*, *Watermelon Nights*, and *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*). Writing of urban California Indians and their family members who live on the remnants of rancherias set aside by the Spanish, Sarris introduces readers to modern Indian experiences that are not widely known. In *Grand Avenue* (1994), the interconnected stories told by narrators of different generations reveal a fragmented family beset by land loss, poverty, and rivalries that nonetheless can be gathered up and woven into a meaningful whole, like the basket that young Alice miraculously makes. Her basket, like Sarris's novel, transforms and sustains Pomo traditions. Sherman Alexie's work includes tales of urban Indians in Seattle (*Ten Little Indians*) as well as stories from reservations to the east (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *Reservation Blues*). Like Sarris's protagonists, Alexie's characters often salvage just enough goodness, humor, and love from their difficult lives to affirm their tribal identities and endure. Alexie unflinchingly reveals ugly details of reservation life and explores the angst of successful urban Indians, yet he returns again and again to the humor and anger that make survival and resistance possible.

These works challenge our notions of the West not only by inserting minority viewpoints into narratives that too often focus solely on Euro-American experiences but also by incorporating settings such as Los Angeles and Seattle into western literature. They provide us with new input on the vexed questions of what is the West and what makes it significant. They also suggest an important parallel between western and ethnic literatures: just as the sense of a distinctive regional identity is undermined by claims of a national significance for the West, the significance of minority literatures for their communities may be lost when we look to these works for help in rethinking national narratives. Thus current critical practices typically insist on awareness of one's own subject position and seek significance without insisting on unifying national or even regional narratives. Contemporary literature also frequently avoids unified narratives, singular perspectives, and the certainties of binary thinking. For Native American writers today, this is not simply a contemporary stance like the one Etulain finds in recent western literature, it is also rooted in tribal traditions, such as the dynamic balance between the Beloved Path of peace and the Chickamauga consciousness of resistance that Justice describes in Cherokee culture.

Early Native writers created multivoiced texts by writing autobiographies that tell tribal histories as much as they tell individual life stories (see Scott Lyons's discussion of "hybrid autobiographies" in chapter 13). Like these early writers, contemporary Native American authors write with awareness that the individual is less significant than the group. Works like Momaday's *Way to Rainy Mountain* and Silko's *Storyteller* (1981) follow in this tradition of combining memoir with tribal and family histories and stories. Anishinaabe scholar and author Gerald Vizenor has coined the phrase "terminal creeds" to describe binary certainties, and his complex, shifting works pose challenges because he playfully undermines all assumptions readers might have about character types, plot lines, and even the meaning of words. Cherokee writer Thomas King produces more accessible fiction and essays, but he also undermines readers' certainties. In *Medicine River* (1989), each chapter introduces a new story, but readers never get all of it; some of the truth is always concealed. Using multiple narrators within a novel is a long-standing literary technique, used by such notable writers as Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. Authors like Diane Glancy (Cherokee) and Louise Erdrich (Anishinaabe or Ojibway) use this technique to represent the complexity of tribal historical experience. In her novel of the Trail of Tears, *Pushing the Bear* (1996), Glancy uses many voices to demonstrate the divisions within the Cherokee community, which included Christians and traditionalists as well as supporters and opponents of removal, and to resist moral certitudes. Likewise, Louise Erdrich employs a range of characters to tell her stories. In *Tracks* (1989), the narrators Pauline and Nanapush would seem to be opposites – she is mixed blood, Catholic, and young; he is an aging full blood traditional healer. Yet Nanapush is one of the few members of the community who can read and write in English, and he marries a woman who is Catholic and leans toward progressive accommodation to ensure the survival of her family and her land claim. The difficulties Pauline brings to her community in this and other novels (*Love Medicine* and *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*) are not rooted in her religious affiliation or her racial mixing but in her mental instability, which prompts her to disguise all her acts of self-aggrandizement as acts of self-sacrifice. In these multivoiced texts, there are few clear distinctions between heroes and villains, good and evil. While the uncertainty is unsettling, it is in the end affirming. They show that we may love despite the flaws of our beloved, that we may survive despite the wrongs we have done, and that communities continue despite every effort to bring their cultures to an end. The perspective of this literature is affirming for all people, because we all are under the sway of human imperfections, yet it is rooted in Native traditions of respecting differences and seeking balance rather than dominance. Contemporary Native American literature thus continues to speak to the specific communities out of which it emerges and to a larger group of readers who may not get all the jokes but find more joy in stories of Indian survival than in tales of conquest.

Literature of the US West is clearly far more than the formula western, although that genre still exerts a powerful influence. Current scholarship offers us new ways to view the West, westerns, and westerners, embracing multiculturalism and shattering notions of a unified tale of progress replayed in western expansion. Yet ethnic

literatures, even Native American literature which is so often situated in western spaces, often resist regionalist readings. If contemporary Native American literature is not quite western, some works and authors do engage with regional tropes, and some further the project of re-envisioning the West and its significance. The multiplicity of voices from the US West and from Native American communities may not be engaging in the same conversations, but they are both affirming the value of their distinctive communities. Whether we are insiders or outsiders to those groups, we have much to gain from listening in.

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The Early Modern Writers of the US South

John Lowe

Despite H.L. Mencken's claims to the contrary in his notorious 1917 screed, "The Sahara of the Bozart," the United States South did indeed have an extensive literary history before World War I. Captain John Smith, Thomas Jefferson, William Gilmore Simms, Edgar Allan Poe, Frederick Douglass, Solomon Northop, Kate Chopin, Mark Twain, George Washington Cable, Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, Charles Chesnut – to mention only a few names – certainly comprised a worthy foundation for the twentieth-century cadre of Southern writers. Moreover, there had been an appreciative audience for Southern writing in the North both before and after the Civil War; in antebellum days, "Old Southwest Humor" found an outlet in New York magazines for tales – usually told in elevated English by aristocratic narrators – about dialect-speaking, scandalous backwoods tricksters, horse traders, and ne'er-do-wells, against the backdrop of quiltings, barn-raising, and church camp meetings. The narrators and their characters thereby represented the refined aristocrats and the earthy "peasants" of the feudal – and thus European – South. Davy Crockett, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, George Washington Harris, and Johnson Jones Hooper created unforgettable rascals like Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood; such trickster antics would later inspire many of Faulkner's comic creations, including the Snopes family and the local yokels of *The Hamlet* (1948), and the poor whites of Erskine Caldwell's rural comedies, whose raucous sexuality was part of modernism's breaking of social taboos. The stage version of *Tobacco Road* (premiere 1933) was for many years the longest running play in Broadway's history, proving both the resilience of stereotypes about the South and the ways such images could morph over time, through events like the Great Depression, industrialization, and the lure of new Southern cities and factories.

In a different, more aristocratic vein, the post-bellum "romance of reunion" shaped the "plantation school" writing of Thomas Nelson Page, Harry Stillwell Edwards, Thomas Dixon, and Joel Chandler Harris; northern readers eagerly embraced romantic tales of the "days befoh' de wah" when "darkies" were happy; readers also found appeal in reconstruction stories of marriages between Southern belles and Union soldiers, who

soon found that their ideas about race relations were mistaken. The plantation novel, if not its initial ideology, continued in the modernist era in the diverse works of black and white writers such as Faulkner, Margaret Mitchell, Stark Young, Eudora Welty, Frank Yerby, and Margaret Walker, and continues today in the novels of African-Americans such as Ernest Gaines, Toni Morrison, Gayl Jones, and Edward P. Jones, but also in popular romantic variants by writers such as Kyle Onstott and John Jakes.

There was, however, undoubtedly a rupture between literary eras; we usually demark this with World War I, but it more properly begins with the advent of automobiles, electricity, airplanes, the telephone – in short, modern industrial life – and the flip side of industrialization, environmentally damaging sawmills and factories, chaotic new urban centers, pollution, and most ominously, horrendously worse forms of warfare, as reflected in the great European conflict which drew in thousands of young black and white Southern men. Like other US intellectuals, Southern artists of all types were swept up in the chaotic changes caused by these events and factors, particularly those related to new perceptions of European social transformations, especially in regard to gender and race: aesthetic innovation, Freudianism and sexual experimentalism, and the rise of high modernism, first in European capitals (especially Paris and Berlin), then in northern US cities such as Washington and New York. Southern writers such as William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Katherine Anne Porter saw these changes in Europe first hand, but others were profoundly influenced back home.

In a sense Southerners were prepared for this onslaught, for they had suffered invasion and defeat only a few decades earlier, and had seen families, farms, towns and cities devastated or even destroyed. The loss of the capital of slaves and the breakup of plantations, coupled with lost markets in commodities and new forms of blight like the boll weevil made a “wasteland” long before industry added its plagues. Ironically, some of their own had championed the industrialization of the South early on; Atlanta’s Henry Grady used his position as editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* to push the case for the “New South,” a cause also championed by Tuskegee’s Booker T. Washington and North Carolina’s progressive Walter Hines Page. Soon, however, writers working between the turn of the century and World War I began to see the problems of this stance; the dismay of Ellen Glasgow, Sidney Lanier, and Charles Chesnutt foretold the attitude of the 12 Vanderbilt agrarians, whose Depression-era manifesto of 1930, *I’ll Take My Stand*, argued forcefully for a return to agricultural culture. The principal figures – Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom – would go on to become early and skillful devotees of literary modernism, Southern style, particularly in poetry. Ransom set a strong example in his belief that truth could only come through the local and the particular. The Depression deepened the pessimistic mood of the South, which had suffered one of the greatest floods in the nation’s history in 1927 and a devastating three-year drought soon after, so the region’s continuing and worsening poverty became in a way a metaphor for the state of the entire nation. Eventually, Roosevelt’s programs, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, Rural Electrification Program, and the Federal Writer’s Project began to inject hope, but new energies began to circulate from the region’s writers as well, especially

in the work of Faulkner, writers associated with Vanderbilt (the Fugitives/Agrarians) and the University of North Carolina (Paul Green, Thomas Wolfe, Howard Odum), and the black Southerners who were part of the New Negro Renaissance in Chicago, Washington, and especially, Harlem. The aims of these writers often conflicted; the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand* were all white men, most of whom at the time saw no place for black or female Southerners in the lofty halls of regional art. Some of them, however later regretted their pronouncements in the collection; indeed, Robert Penn Warren, who had defended segregation there, later became a champion of Civil Rights for African-Americans.

During the 1930s, Faulkner and the Harlem writers, by contrast, strove to give voice to the downtrodden, the South and the nation's "throwaway" people, but also to give play to folk wisdom, cultural rituals, new artistic developments and colonies, and changes in communal structures. Many of the similarly minded rising new writers (albeit white ones) were published alongside non-Southern high modernists such as Aldous Huxley, T.S. Eliot, Paul Valery, and Ford Maddox Ford in the pages of *The Southern Review*, which Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren revived from 1935 to 1942 in Baton Rouge.

One can also argue that the modernist age of Southern writing began in earnest some years earlier, with Jean Toomer's radically experimental short novel, *Cane* (1923), which built on the Louisiana-born but Washington-bred author's mixed race background and interest in mixing genres. The work employed poetry, prose, drama, even geometrical patterns to meditate on what Toomer saw as the "swan song" of black folk culture in the South, as he witnessed it during a teaching stint in Sparta, Georgia. Set partly in an increasingly anachronistic carter's shop, economic and spiritual despair permeate the stories. Equally attuned to surviving forms of mysticism, lyrical conceptions of the brooding landscape, and especially, the forms of Southern sexualities (including dangerous cross-racial pairings), Toomer alternated his stories of alienated, often doomed Southern lovers and eccentrics with stories set in Chicago and Washington, where recent immigrants from the south mingled with sophisticated black northerners against a backdrop of stylish new forms of entertainment, fashion, and club life. Scenes set in northern theaters, however, are just as subject to irruptions of madness or violence as those played out in Southern canebreaks and cabins. A major focus of *Cane* is its intertwined thematic of actual and metaphorical impotence, and the difficulty of achieving manhood – particularly for black men – in an alienating, isolating modernist world, where institutions have proved bankrupt, and increasing mobility and deteriorated morality limit the opportunities for men to prove their valor. We see this motif – which of course had been memorably expressed by T.S. Eliot (following motifs in Fraser and in Jessie Weston's works) – employed powerfully in almost all of the works to be considered here, including those written by women.

Toomer's novel had its most dramatic effect among the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, but probably also influenced a young Ernest Hemingway, whose path-breaking collection *In Our Time* (1925) shows marked resemblance to *Cane*. Interestingly, *Cane* also drew a positive reaction from Allen Tate, who saw the novel's rejection

of formulaic patterns of Southern fiction refreshing and original. He would take this path himself in his great poem, "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and in his Civil War novel *The Fathers* (1938) Although it is unlikely that William Faulkner read Toomer, his early fiction displays a similar post-war daring in its bitter veterans, jaded flappers, and increasingly disruptive modernization and mechanization. *Soldier's Pay* (1926), his first novel, offers an epitome of these issues, and begins on a train bearing a severely wounded Southern veteran back to his Georgia home. Rejected by his shallow, epicene fiancé, Donald McMahan wins the loyalty of Margaret Powers, a fellow passenger on the train, later his nurse, and finally, his wife. She is assisted by another passenger, the seemingly hard but vulnerable veteran Joe Gilligan, and McMahan's juvenile lover, Emmy. Saturated with the influence of Swinburne, Beardsley, Wilde and Freud, the novel is more effective at painting a changed South than in telling a coherent and compelling story, but it set the stage for Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha novels, all of them reflecting his hometown of Oxford, Mississippi, a series started with *Flags in the Dust* (originally titled *Sartoris*, 1929), the first of several family chronicles.

Bayard Sartoris returns to Mississippi after witnessing the aerial death of his twin brother John; living with his elderly grandfather Bayard and great Aunt Jenny, his reckless exploits mirror his ancestors' during the Civil War, but minus the strict code of honor that old Bayard still embodies. Young Bayard's furious motion throughout the book stems from his guilt over Johnny's death, his mourning for his own young wife, who died in childbirth, and his inability to summon a passion for living, even after he marries and impregnates the lovely Narcissa Benbow, whose arty brother, Horace – a glass-blower – has returned from the war as well. Horace's sordid affair with a married woman, Belle Mitchell, who becomes his wife, builds on Faulkner's increasing arsenal of Freudian motifs, which he would exploit powerfully in a succeeding novel, *Sanctuary* (1931), which begins with an impotent gangster raping a reckless Ole Miss coed with a corncob. Her kidnapping takes readers into the modern hell of a Memphis whorehouse, where Popeye eagerly watches Temple have sex with a potent thug. Sensational? Yes – but the novel's profound and unflinching dissection of evil in a seemingly "progressing" world is accomplished via magnificently conceived, if often chilling, narrative technique. While ostensibly drawing on the resources of the detective novel and *film noir*, Faulkner was likely also thinking of new images of the modern Southern woman, which had been powerfully evoked in books like Frances Newman's satiric farewell to the Southern belle, *The Hard Boiled Virgin* (1926).

The most radical experiment of this period, however, came in Faulkner's 1929 novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, which is the same story told four times: the first rendition comes from an idiot, Benjy, whose strange syntax and scrambled sense of time create havoc for the reader, thereby making her feel Benjy's inner confusion. The following three sections are by his emotionally distraught older brother Quentin, who is sent to Harvard on the proceeds from selling Benjy's pasture, a sale that also finances the society wedding of their beloved sister Caddie, whose lost honor – and resultant pregnancy – leads to her union with a man who doesn't know the child isn't his. Jason, a third brother, repels the reader with his brutal treatment of the other characters and his

thoroughly capitalist values, but his salty, self-mocking and often comic pronouncements provide both clarity of a sort and entertainment after Benjy's and Quentin's often mystifying ruminations. The final section, an omniscient narrator's exploration of the consciousness of the Compson's black servant Dilsey, brings the other sections into configuration, forming a tragic coda to a lost family, for by the end Quentin has committed suicide, Caddie has disappeared into a life of promiscuity, her daughter Miss Quentin has eloped with a carnival worker, and Benjy, now castrated at Jason's command, is about to be sent to an asylum.

Faulkner created a variant on family sexual secrets in *As I Lay Dying* (1930), a back-country pendant to *The Sound and the Fury*; the poor-white Bundrens struggle across the torrid landscape with their mother's putrifying body, honoring her wish to be buried in Jefferson, 40 miles away. Fifty-nine interior monologues, centered on the journey but also on each family member's secondary motif for reaching Jefferson, relentlessly fragment the reader's perspective and force an extraordinary involvement in a story that is both richly comic and deeply tragic. The central conflict of the brothers Darl and Jewel over the disposition of their mother's corpse is ultimately adjudicated by the mostly silent but ultimately decisive eldest brother, Cash. The volatile mix of modernist expression, primitivist portraiture, and psychological and sexual motifs results in one of Faulkner's greatest achievements, which he himself termed a *tour de force*. The characters speak to each other in simple country vernacular; their conscious thoughts are poetic, but purposeful; their unconscious inner desires and perceptions are rendered impressionistically, sometimes surreally.

Faulkner's willingness to expose the South's racial conundrums cost him dearly in Southern circles, but led to some of the most searing and searching narratives in the nation's history. *Light in August* (1932) forms a triptych with *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942), providing an electrifying and shocking portrayal of the costs of racial oppression for the people of the state, region, and nation. The first cited novel documents the tortured life of the seeming orphan Joe Christmas, who is never sure whether he is black or white. His liaisons with a prostitute, black women, and finally, the spinster daughter of white abolitionists lead to him killing the last, and his castration and death at the hands of a racist mob. His story is framed and interbraided with that of the gentle Lena Grove, an unwed mother looking for her child's father, assisted by the love-struck bachelor Byron Bunch, and ultimately, Byron's strange friend, the defrocked pastor Gail Hightower, whose feverish recreations of his dead grandfather's Confederate raid has cost him both his congregation and his wife. Joe's actual grandfather and his foster-father are religious fanatics, who illustrate the tragic ways in which Southern religion has been hopelessly compromised by racial bigotry. The novel also meditates on rapacious new industries of the South, which have led to erosion of the land, migrant workers, and predatory sawmills that devastate the landscape, while reducing many of the novel's male characters to semi-mindless automata. The modernist thematic of alienation goes beyond Christmas to encompass many of the other characters, echoing the isolation and despair of Faulkner's earlier protagonists such as Bayard Sartoris, Horace Benbow, Quentin Compson, and Darl Bundren.

Absalom, Absalom! was written at virtually the same time as a lesser but also impressive novel, *The Unvanquished* (1938). The latter is set during the Civil War and Reconstruction, while the former alternates between those times and the twentieth century. *The Unvanquished*, returning to the Sartoris family, ponders the ways in which warfare unleashes a rage for power and revenge among combatants, but also among civilians, including even elderly Southern ladies like Bayard's grandmother, whose schemes to get mules and lost silver from the Yankees lead to her corruption and eventually, death, at the hand of sordid thugs whose aid she has sought. Bayard's revenge on her killers, with the aid of his black former slave and companion Ringo, is a compelling tale; their action is made necessary by the wartime absence of his father, the paterfamilias John Sartoris, who is forced to marry his cross-dressing companion soldier, Drusilla Hawke. These latter two also cross over a moral line by killing carpetbaggers and stealing ballots; John's betrayal of a business partner leads to his death, which Bayard is urged to revenge by Drusilla. His honorable response leads to the killer's banishment, but not an act of murder. This rather conventionally told story nevertheless offers a keen-eyed and compelling vision of the radical effect of the war on the South; its antebellum prologue offers rich comedy, as the young boys take shelter from the Yankees under Granny's billowing petticoats, but quickly segues into war's deprivations and the corruptions I have mentioned.

Absalom, Absalom! by contrast, returns to the methods of *The Sound and the Fury*, scrambling chronology, as the tale of the rise, decline and fall of the Sutpen family is rehearsed by Quentin Compson and his Harvard roommate Shreve McCannon in a frigid college dormitory. Readers know from the outset, as in *Light in August*, what is most significant about the earlier story; Thomas Sutpen's son Henry shot his best friend, the elegant and refined Charles Bon, originally from Haiti, and Henry's roommate at Ole Miss and then combat companion during the war, in order to prevent him from marrying Henry's sister Judith. Set up in the mode of a detective novel, the narrative keeps expanding in meaning as new and startling facts about the murder arise, culminating first in the revelation that Bon already had a black mistress and child, then that he is Henry's half brother by Sutpen's Haitian first wife; and finally, that that first wife had black blood. Thus the hidden motif of the novel is that old racist refrain, "yes, but would you want your sister to marry one?" Like *The Sound and the Fury*, the story is told by four narrators – Quentin, Shreve, Mr. Compson, and Rosa Coldfield, Sutpen's sister-in-law, a poetess of the Lost Cause inflamed by Sutpen's brutal sexual offer to her after her sister's death. Also like the earlier Compson book, a silent but very significant character is Clytie, Sutpen's daughter by a slave woman, who is ultimately responsible for burning herself and an elderly Henry alive in the Sutpen mansion when Miss Rosa appears bent on taking him to authorities in Jefferson. Like *Light in August's* Joe Christmas, Charles Bon can "pass" as white, making the concept of a fixed and inferior black identity absurd, but also fomenting enraged responses on the part of white characters, who cannot abide the thought of racial pollution, even when there is no apparent negative consequence, and indeed, in the case of Charles Bon, a definite contribution to the cultivation and refinement of the family. The effect of the Sutpen

saga on contemporary characters powerfully documents the stranglehold of the past on all Southerners, black and white.

Go Down, Moses began, as *The Unvanquished* did, as a set of related short stories; in both cases Faulkner rewrote them to make them work together as a novel. Again centering on a generational novel, the narrative begins in antebellum times and comically, as the twin bachelor McCaslin brothers attempt to evade the marrying schemes of the spinster Sophonsiba, while also trying to practice an enlightened form of slavery, which includes chasing their near-white enslaved brother, Tomey's Turl when he repeatedly runs to Miss Sophonsiba's plantation to visit his beloved Tennie.

Like *The Unvanquished*, however, the stories become increasingly tragic, as the son of one of the twins and Sophonsiba comes to maturity under the guidance of an old Indian/negro hunter Sam Fathers, and his cousin McCaslin Edmonds. As in *Absalom Absalom!* a tragic racial secret underlies the family; the patriarch Carothers McCaslin raped a slave woman, and then, years later, his daughter with that woman, producing Tomey. The latter's son, the heroic and resourceful "black McCaslin" heir, Lucas Beauchamp, duels with Zack Edmonds over Mollie, Lucas's wife, who has been called to the big house to nurse Zack's motherless son. Ike's doomed but somewhat admirable effort to renounce his heritage and to somehow set the racial account right ultimately leads nowhere, and he winds up rejecting Roth Edmonds's mulatto mistress, who comes to him in the hunting camp looking for her child's father.

In strong counterpoint to the racial and familial saga is the story of the diminishing wilderness where most of the male characters hunt. Old Ben, pursued for generations, is a fabled bear whose death requires the raising of a heroic dog, Lion, the reckless but ignorant courage of a young backwoods giant, Boon, and the cunning and wisdom of the old hunter Sam Fathers. The logging of the Delta forests, the penetration of the railroads, and the rapaciousness of modern society stain the final chapters and lead to a magnificent tribute to the fading wilderness, limned in some of Faulkner's greatest prose.

Faulkner wrote many other novels, but the ones considered here will always be seen as his most experimental, as he drew on his reading of modernist masters such as Joyce, Eliot, Anderson, Hemingway, and Wolfe to reconfigure the enduring subjects and the-matics of Southern life in a shockingly honest, sometimes brutal manner.

Faulkner's influence grew over the years; his contemporary, Thomas Wolfe, of Asheville, North Carolina, employed a more conventional style but one equally and sometimes excessively, verbose and ornamented. Like Faulkner, memory, sexuality, and family conflicts lie at the heart of his very long novels, which Faulkner professed to admire. The first, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), concentrated on the troubled marriage of Eliza and William Oliver Gant (a stonemason), and on their traumatized children, particularly Eugene, obviously a stand-in for the author. Eliza's home, like the Wolfe's, is also a boarding house, thereby bringing forward a parade of eccentric lodgers who pass in and out of the family's lives, including Laura James, a boarder with whom Eugene is smitten, only to have her jilt him. Other boarders are invalids, and the thematic of illness and death is advanced through them and the tragic story of Eugene's

sardonic tubercular brother Ben, and eventually, the death by cancer of the patriarch Thomas. *Of Time and the River* (1935) continued the Gant saga, as the family ages and diverges into new families, while Eugene completes his education, largely through travel. Really writing one great story – a fictionalized form of his biography – Wolfe tried to start anew in his other two novels (published posthumously as *The Web and the Rock* (1939) and *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940)), by renaming his central character George “Monk” Webber, concentrating on his education and travels through the north and Europe, and on his love affair with a Jewish New York stage designer Esther Jack (a fictional avatar of Wolfe’s own lover, Aline Bernstein). This quartet of narratives, however, is really one story, ultimately dominated by Eugene/George, and in the later work, his thwarted love affair with the older, married Esther. The scenes set in Nazi dominated Germany in *You Can't Go Home Again* are particularly striking, since the rampant anti-Semitism forces George to examine his relation to Esther Jack more closely. Also memorable is Eugene’s friendship with Starwick in *Of Time and the River*, whose eventual revelation as a homosexual leads the hero to reject him. One of the great thematics of the set of novels is the failure of education and sophistication to bring happiness in a modernist world of contradictions and increasingly menacing political shadows, and the difficulty a supposedly “liberated” artist/intellectual has in accepting sexual, racial, or religious difference.

Others felt this way too. We therefore need to pay more attention to the congruence and overlap of the Harlem Renaissance and the Southern Renaissance. While the latter period has most often been focused on white writers, it seems clear that we must now include black Southern modernists as well, such as Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Sterling Brown, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and the Southern inspired works of W.E.B. Du Bois.

A world away from Wolfe’s mountains, in Florida, Zora Neale Hurston was also fascinated by questing figures, but most of hers were black females. Perhaps no other writer in American literary history save Melville or Emily Dickinson has had such a spectacular return to prominence after decades of neglect than Zora Neale Hurston. Her image now appears on murals in chain-bookstores, on coffee-cups, tee-shirts, and notepads. She is claimed by feminists, womanists, folklorists, anthropologists, journalists, dramatists, and humorists as a founding member of their “clubs.” So why was she forgotten for so many years?

Hurston certainly wasn’t born to celebrity status. Although she *said* she was born in 1901 (or sometimes it was 1903) in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, where her Daddy was the local Baptist preacher and sometime mayor, she actually came into the world in 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama, hard by Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute. It was only after the family moved to Eatonville a few years later that they began to rise in the world through her father’s growing reputation in the Baptist hierarchy.

Hurston grew up learning all the biblical stories but also the wonderful tales she heard listening in on the “lyin’ sessions” townsmen had on the porch of Joe Clarke’s store. She soon learned to invent tales herself and imagined a glorious world where

she could mimic the deeds of Thor and other European gods. Her family's domestic security was shattered, however, by her mother's death in 1904. The daughter of "respectable" people and a former schoolteacher, Lucy Potts Hurston nevertheless had a hard time raising her eight children, as John Hurston was often not home; part of his traveling included philandering, which brought discord into the home, especially after Lucy's death when he married his current girl-friend, Mattie. She and Zora were soon fighting, and John farmed his daughter out, first to boarding school in Jacksonville, where she learned what it meant to be "colored," and later to other family members. Bored with tending children and doing domestic chores, Hurston escaped to become a lady's maid with a Gilbert and Sullivan troupe; there she learned the ways of the theater and how she could use humor to deal with bossy white folks. She wound up in Baltimore where she studied at Morgan State; thrilled by her return to reading, she wangled her way into Howard University, where she studied with some of the leading scholars of the time, such as Alain Locke. Subsequently, she received scholarship money to become the first black student at Barnard. Soon she was under the spell of legendary founders of American anthropology, Barnard's Ruth Benedict and Columbia's Franz Boas, and working toward a doctorate.

Hurston's advent into New York coincided with the eruption of the Harlem Renaissance. Her student magazine writing in Washington prepped her for literary competitions that journals such as *Crisis* and *Opportunity* were offering. She won 2nd place for a story and first place for a short play; this led to her publication of a short story, "Spunk," in Locke's ground breaking *The New Negro* (1925), and instant inclusion in the fabled Harlem nightclub scene. Hurston, with her dazzling wit, storytelling ability, and constant readiness to act out all the parts of her many stories, became a universal favorite with the other young writers of the day such as Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, and especially, Langston Hughes. The last, with Hurston, joined Wallace Thurman to publish the one-issue wonder, *FIRE!!* (1926), an amazing magazine bent on thumbing its nose at more "polite" and mostly older writers such as Du Bois and Fauset, who to these "young Turks" seemed to care far too much about "respectability" and "dictee" ways.

Hurston made other contacts too; Mrs. Charlotte Mason bankrolled Hurston's folklore-gathering trips for several years, but kept tight control over her protégé's publications. Hurston at this point wanted to be an anthropologist more than a creative writer, and she used Mrs. Mason's funds to gather Southern and Caribbean materials for doctoral studies with Boas. Eventually, Hurston published her research, taking up a whole issue of the prestigious *Journal of American Folklore*. All this while, however, she was keeping her fiction going, and when one of her best stories, a bittersweet tale about a tested marriage, "The Gilded Six-Bits," was published in *Story*, Lippincott wrote her asking if she had a novel they could see. She replied she did, and then had to write one. Most writers go for material they know well in a clutch, and Hurston did too, penning the story of her parents' fated marriage in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), a lyrical but troubling saga that ends tragically with John's collision with a train. She larded the tale with rich folklore, poetic dialogue, and a provocative central paradox:

John's undeniable talent in the pulpit derives from the same thing that undoes him, his powerful physical presence and appetite for life.

Getting the novel accepted meant that she could finally publish her folklore material in a new form. Reshaping the material by inserting herself as a "character" who links the tales together as we watch her gather them, she came up with *Mules and Men* (1935), still a classic of American folklore, which also reads like a novel, especially the scenes dealing with her initiation as a hoodoo priestess in New Orleans.

Hurston got some more grants to extend her research and was soon off to Jamaica and Haiti. These trips eventually led to a second anthropological work, *Tell My Horse* (1938). She wrote another novel, her magnificent *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) during this period, in order, she said, to embalm the love she had for a man whose demand that she end her career for him led her instead to drop him. The narrative, set in Eatonville, but also in the Everglades, details the three marriages of Janie Mae Crawford Killens Stark Woods, and how each factors in her inner growth and eventually, her solitary but transcendent personhood, even though she has had to kill and then bury her third husband Teacake, the great love of her life. The novel's amazing poetic voice comes right out of African-American folk culture, but is shaped by Hurston's now fully developed and very personal aesthetic. It has often been taught as a book about women's liberation, but it speaks at many registers for all readers everywhere.

During the 1930s, Hurston spent 18 months working for the Federal Writers Project in Florida. She collected some amazing material, learned about other groups in her native state, but also used some of her time to write her third novel, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), a superb retelling of the events of Exodus, but from a black perspective and in dialect. Although the book often verges on parody of the sacred text, it also transforms Moses into an African hoodoo man, and comments cogently and powerfully on the problems and opportunities of racial leadership, religion, and the conundrums of exceptionalist definitions of group identity.

Readers are often disappointed with Hurston's autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), which she didn't really want to write. It is maddeningly reticent about the most vital facts (such as date of birth, Hurston's two husbands, her involvement in the Harlem Renaissance); however, as a piece of writing it dazzles, especially now that we have the chapters expurgated by her publisher during the war, chapters highly critical of American imperialism and racism. The book also presents an intriguing portrait of Hurston's aesthetics – how they were generated, transformed, and employed in her writing and work. Throughout, Hurston evinces a supremely confident, humor-drenched voice, but she also plumbs many of the key conundrums of human existence and offers observations in highly poetic and poignant formulations, often based in an Afrocentric aesthetic.

Hurston wandered a good bit during the 1940s and 50s, embarking on a strange voyage to Honduras in search of buried treasure, finding teaching and clerical jobs here and there, but she never gave up her writing. Her final published work was in some ways her most ambitious. *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) focuses on white figures and "Cracker" culture, drawing on Hurston's Federal Writers Project work and her

absorbed reading of her white friend Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' Florida frontier narratives. Jim and Arvay Meserve's troubled marriage receives a Freudian presentation, but against the backdrop of an accurately observed cultural milieu. The novel also shows Hurston's beloved Florida undergoing tremendous changes, as industrialization, tourism, and real estate developments pick up steam. Arvay's slow grappling with her psychological problems and her difficult marriage in many ways echoes *Their Eyes*, but with a different kind of treatment and conclusion. In several ways the novel reveals Hurston, ever Protean, experimenting with tone, voice, and quite modernist concepts of the self.

When funds dried up, Hurston tried to support herself with odd jobs, including working with William Bradford Huie to report the sensational trial of Ruby McCollum, a black woman accused of murdering a white lover. Hurston also found time to rail against the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, which she felt insulted the achievements of black teachers and schools by inferring African-Americans could only get good education in white settings. After resorting to domestic work, Hurston became ill; too proud to appeal to her family, she found refuge in the county welfare home in Fort Pierce, Florida. She died there in 1960.

Since her death, Hurston has been claimed by a new generation of African-American women writers. Her fellow Southerner, Georgia's Alice Walker asserts no book is more important to her than *Their Eyes*, and she personally had a tombstone placed near Hurston's unmarked grave in Fort Pierce in 1973. It is high time we recognize Hurston as a Southern writer as well. She loved the South, always considered herself a Southerner, and wrote her best work out of her native Florida. Her books mirror a dynamic and varied African-American culture, but also the larger South this group helps comprise. Her attentiveness to social issues, historical events, and national politics are often eclipsed by the power and beauty of her characters and language, but all these elements function integrally to form one of the most compelling and memorable portraits of the American South we have.

Another black Southerner writing during this period had no use for Hurston. Richard Wright, who suffered many brutal indignities during his poverty-stricken early years in Mississippi (detailed in his 1945 biography, *Black Boy*), never had the secure racial identity Hurston acquired in her all-black town. His raging fictions, beginning with the searing stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), force the reader to stare directly into the South's horrifying racial practices. He would then turn his attention to the diasporan blacks in Chicago, where he had migrated as a young man. *Native Son* (1940) concerns a young Bigger Thomas, whose role as chauffeur to a white family leads to his accidental killing of a young heiress. Panicked, he mutilates and burns her body, but then tries to draw a ransom. Ultimately, he brutally kills his black girlfriend, and after a hectic chase, is imprisoned and then tried. His white attorney recasts his story as a representative and tragic one, but a seemingly unrepentant and indeed, defiant Bigger is sentenced to death.

Subsequently, Wright joined the Communist party, lived for a time in New York, and wrote existentialist and Freudian novels set in the north. He returned to his

Southern roots in short stories and a powerful final novel, *The Long Dream* (1958), which details the dangerous double life of a black undertaker, Tyree, and his reckless son, Fishbelly; the story culminates in a fictional recreation of a huge dancehall fire that actually transpired in Natchez during Wright's youth. The novel concludes with Fishbelly's exile to France, after the murder of his father by his former partner in criminal activities, the white police chief, and Fishbelly's near death at the hands of the same figure. The novel importantly focuses on black sexuality, as both central figures use and abuse black women, who sometimes mount powerful arguments against their oppression.

After his self-imposed exile to Paris in 1947, Wright wrote *The Outsider* (1953), an existentialist novel; a Freudian novel about white characters, *Savage Holiday* (1954); *The Long Dream*, and its unpublished sequel, *Island of Hallucinations*, and several non-fictional books. In the City of Light, Wright reigned as chief black literary master for a diasporan group of writers and intellectuals; he also served as a major influence in his last decades on the young writers Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. *Black Power* (1954); *White Man, Listen!* (1957); *The Color Curtain* (1956) and *Pagan Spain* (1957) were written out of Wright's increasing involvement with communities of color in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, situating him as one of the most transnational of Southern writers. Wright, like Faulkner and Hurston, was ceaselessly experimental and protean; each book he wrote represented a departure in some way from the ones that preceded it, often both in terms of subject matter and style.

Mississippi also produced two other key figures of literary modernism, Eudora Welty and Tennessee Williams. Welty's public persona as a genteel maiden lady belied her steely intelligence, her sense of artistic and aesthetic daring, and her wicked sense of humor. Her folk protagonists possess an earthy wisdom that elevates them above primitivism, even when they blindly oppose isolated intellectuals and artists trying to elevate the culture.

Welty herself grew up in a comfortable family in Jackson, but received her education in Wisconsin, New York, and Iowa. Like Hurston, leaving the South for a time gave her valuable perspective, particularly on the rural Mississippians she documented in writing and in photographs for the *Work Projects Administration* (WPA) during the Depression. Welty's many historical tales – "A Still Place," for instance, involves Audubon – magically recreate the fabled age of the wilderness South, replete with pirates, Indians, and damsels in distress (her 1942 novel, *The Robber Bridegroom*, a small gem in this tradition, became a Broadway musical). Welty, an expert gardener, excels (as Faulkner did) in painting the haunting beauty of the Southern landscape, identifying trees and flowers, summoning up scents, conjuring the varieties of the often violent climate as it interacts with her characters' lives. She created superlative dialogue, especially in the hilarious repartee of her comic stories such as "Petrieved Man" or "Why I Live at the P.O." Like Faulkner, Wright, and Hurston, she knew exactly when and how to use dialect, and when to wax lyrical. Her first two short story collections, *A Curtain of Green* (1941) and *The Wide Net and Other Stories* (1943) signaled the advent of a major, multi-dimensional voice in Southern fiction.

Her other novels, *Delta Wedding* (1946), *Losing Battles* (1970) and *The Optimist's Daughter* (which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972) are detailed, sometimes rambling, but eloquent evocations of differing kinds of Mississippi families and communities as they face moments of change and challenge. Both Southern tradition and anti-intellectualism get their due, alongside profound meditations on Southern modes of sexual identity and racial constructs. Many critics, however, regard her short stories as her greatest achievement, especially the connected cycle of tales, *Golden Apples* (1949), which skillfully and lyrically interweaves village tales and folk practices with classical mythology. Welty often focuses on difference, be it deaf mutes, carnival freaks, a grief-stricken black musician, a retarded girl, or a lonely traveling salesman.

Williams, arguably the second greatest US dramatist (after O'Neill) made the South his central focus, and usually placed a white woman at the center of his conflicts. His greatest plays – *The Glass Menagerie* (1945); *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947); *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1958) *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) – present present-day characters dealing with both the burdens of the Southern past and the contradictory and confusing demands of contemporary life.

Williams, born in Mississippi, was raised in St. Louis, the setting of *Menagerie*, but he quickly gravitated to the Big Easy as a young adult, and many of his best works are set there or on the Gulf coast, notably *Streetcar*, *Cat*, *Sweet Bird*, and *Suddenly, Last Summer*. He also set many of his works outside the South, in places like Rome, the Pacific coast of Mexico, and the Galapagos islands, where regional thematics found a new register. Only Lillian Hellman came close to Williams in output and reputation in Southern drama of this period.

Flannery O'Connor's short stories are full of rage and redemption, perhaps because of her resentment of her long affliction (lupus) and her fiery, deeply Catholic judgment of her fundamentalist neighbors in middle Georgia. Her masterpieces include the tragicomedy, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (wherein a vacationing family, led astray by their domineering grandmother, is assassinated by the "Misfit," a sullen criminal and his gang); "Good Country People," about the theft of a bitter young woman's artificial leg by a traveling salesman; "The Displaced Person," wherein a European immigrant is killed with the consent of blacks and whites alike after he sends to Poland for a relative he plans to marry to a black; and "The Artificial Nigger," a classic mockery of racial bias. Her strange novels, *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960) both involve religious fanaticism and tragically misplaced callings to prophecy. Her work has been deeply influential, especially on other Catholic writers, particularly Walker Percy and Cormac McCarthy, but also on her black fellow Georgians, Alice Walker, John O. Killens, and Raymond Andrews. During graduate school in Iowa she read in modernist masters such as Eliot, Joyce and Faulkner, whose style and linguistic experimentation, rather than attitude, ultimately shaped her work. Her isolated life as an invalid in the country under her mother's care led to an extensive epistolary outreach; her letters, models of pithy, concise, provocative expression, are another precious legacy. Questioned about the extremities in which she placed her characters (who are often seen as "grotesques") and the seemingly over-the-top intensity

of her narratives, she famously stated that with deaf people you have to shout, a sentiment perhaps shared by many of her predecessors, peers, and successors in the Southern literary canon.

One of the avenues Southern writers found to national audiences was embracing the modernist cult of the “primitive.” Since Reconstruction (and even earlier) northern and urban Americans had looked to the south for “backwoods” characters, tall tales, and folk humor, idiom and dialect. It was only a step further to the modern grotesques and/or primitives of Erskine Caldwell, Julia Peterkin, Roark Bradford, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, George Wylie Henderson, William Attaway, and DuBose Heyward. These writers variously produced tragic, comic, and even saintly figures from this milieu – one thinks, in the latter sense, of the haunting (if strictly posed) faces in Walter Evans and James Agee’s pictorial narrative, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The most obvious examples, however, of the eccentric, “grotesque” characters may be found in the major writers William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Carson McCullers, and especially, Flannery O’Connor, whose back-country fundamentalists are often thrown unexpectedly and violently into illuminating, if sometimes fatal, scenes of revelation. The fact that Wright, Hurston, and Welty all worked for the Federal Writers Project/WPA gathering folk materials during the 1930s surely accounts for the accuracy of their portrayals of Southern citizens of all types.

Faulkner and Wolfe built many of their fictions on family sagas, a method also employed by the Texas born Katherine Anne Porter. Her itinerant youth, which involved a bout of tuberculosis, led to her marvelous “Miranda” stories, which centered on the often embittered but gloriously intense Rhea family, with its passion for horses, causes, and mistaken loves, and its litany of wasted lives and early deaths. By contrast, Porter’s extended residences in Mexico led to the exotic and powerful stories in her second collection, *Flowering Judas and Other Stories* (1930). The title tale, centered on a repressed young woman who has devoted herself to the Mexican revolutionary cause, creates dramatic tension through her encounters with a fat, indulgent, and married military leader, who wishes to add her to his long list of conquests. Both are contrasted to a heroic young man who kills himself in prison using drugs the heroine has brought him. Another powerful tale, “María Concepción,” concerns the primitive title character’s murder of her worthless husband’s mistress, a triangle set against archeological digs in the village and the ongoing Mexican revolution. Many of Porter’s Mexican tales evince a kind of literary primitivism, but also carry a strong critique of the Catholic church and modes of colonialism. They must now be reconsidered as an opening gambit of Southern transnationalism and hemispheric consciousness. While many of Porter’s fictions concern individuals struggling with isolation, her masterful short novel *Noon Wine* (1937) studies the reactions of a community to a murder, which undo the perpetrator, even though he has been acquitted of the crime.

Curiously, most of the great writers of this period rather ignore Southern cities, although Dubose Heyward set *Porgy* in Charleston’s black slums, and Margaret

Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* made literary capital out of the swagger of a rebuilt, post-bellum Atlanta. It is likely this pattern resulted from an almost obsessive interest in the conflict of the agrarian past and the industrial present and future, which seemingly was best dramatized in the countryside and in small towns like Faulkner's Jefferson. The one great city that finds constant usage in early modern Southern writing is New Orleans, the setting for all or parts of some of Faulkner's novels, several of Williams' and Hellman's plays, and stories and non-fiction by Porter, Hurston, and Warren.

Perhaps the last great early modernist author of one of the most celebrated Southern novels, and after Poe, perhaps the most distinguished Southern poet, Robert Penn Warren, was an early champion of Faulkner. Educated at Vanderbilt, he was the youngest contributor to *I'll Take My Stand*, and before he became famous, an earnest professor at Louisiana State University, where he and his colleague Cleanth Brooks resurrected the celebrated journal *The Southern Review*. He researched his greatest novel while in Baton Rouge; *All the King's Men* (1946) tells a fictionalized version of the short but electrifying career of Louisiana's home-grown, baby-faced Governor – and then Senator – Huey Long, whose demagogic populism made him a threat to Roosevelt's presidency. The novel interweaves a complicated version of Long's life with a tangled chronology full of modern and antebellum flashbacks, replete with brilliant symbolism, often nihilist philosophy on the part of its jaded narrator, Jack Burden, and a shrewd sense of Machiavellian echoes in Southern culture. Like Faulkner, Warren was fixated by the presence of the past in the present, man's struggle against his baser instincts, and the compromises that prove necessary for the workings of society. He employed the sinister metaphor of a malignant spider in its web to stand for the menaces modern life had for hapless individuals.

The writers considered here had many apprentices, heirs, and disciples in the later modern period, including Carson McCullers, William Styron, Ralph Ellison, Truman Capote, Harper Lee, Walker Percy, Lillian Smith, Albert Murray, Bobbie Ann Mason, Lee Smith, Frank Yerby, Jill McCorkle, Barry Hannah, Larry Brown, Reynolds Price, Dave Smith, Ishmael Reed, John Kennedy Toole, Elizabeth Spencer, Raymond Andrews, John O. Killens, Alice Walker, Ernest Gaines, and Cormac McCarthy. A newer generation of what has been termed "postmodern" writers has in turn followed them, prominently among them Edward P. Jones, Madison Smartt Bell, James Wilcox, Tina Ansa, Richard Ford, Brenda Marie Osbey, Yusef Komunyakaa, Tony Kushner, Natasha Tretheway, Tom Wolfe, Anne Rice and Valerie Martin.

These writers – and the many others who were contemporary with them – have been reassessed recently by a new set of critics, who have been unusually interested in race, gender, sexual orientation, economics, national identity, and increasingly, the connections the writers made outside the boundaries of the Old Confederacy, particularly across the Atlantic, the Gulf, and the Caribbean. Hybridity, issues of diaspora (be it Jewish, Italian, Irish, or more usually, African) and perusals of performances of various kinds of identity have predominated. It is a testimony to the power and creativity of these artists that their works continue to provoke and nourish the imagination in

fascinating new ways, through new critical readings that complicate, sometimes contradict, but almost always complement the analyses made in past critical eras. As these modernist works are also increasingly compared and contrasted to those that have followed and will be written in the years to come, we are sure to enjoy both a continuum and continuing shift in the study of Southern letters, mimicking the changing same of the region's great metaphor, the constantly streaming but always shape-shifting Ole Man River.

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Writers on the Left

Alan Wald

I. Evolution the Field

It is only in the twentieth century that “Writers on the Left” became a widespread term for cultural workers with socialist convictions and commitments. Yet poets, novelists, critics, and playwrights have been so habitually and ubiquitously drawn towards radical politics during the past 100 years that the topic may seem gratuitous as a discrete category. What is especially telling about the construction of “Writers on the Left” as an academic field is that, prior to World War II, many books on United States literature attend no differently to radical and revolutionary authors than to others, customarily placing now-forgotten Left-wingers at center stage.

Halford E. Luccock’s *American Mirror: Social, Ethical and Religious Aspects of American Literature, 1930–1940* (1941) moves in its chapters evenly between writers who are today seen as part of the canon, such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, and many Left-wing authors now treated exclusively in books and articles about the Left, such as Fielding Burke, Joy Davidman, Pietro Di Donato, and Albert Maltz. Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska’s *A History of American Poetry, 1900–1940* (1942) apports major sections to Leftists Louis Untermeyer, John Wheelwright, Lola Ridge, and Kenneth Fearing, all of whom are nearly invisible in current histories of United States poetry. After World War II, it is mainly in specialized thematic or regional studies, such as Roy Meyer’s *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* (1965), that we find notable attention to unremembered radicals without isolating them on account of politics; in this instance, novelist Paul Corey.

It is now apparent that several post-World War II contingencies confederated to beget mostly semi-segregated considerations of Left writers in dissertations, essays, scholarly books, series of reprints of poetry and fiction, and anthologies. First is the robust association between radical political commitment and Communism during the middle of the twentieth century, primarily the late 1920s through the late 1950s. The pioneering studies of literary radicalism, such as Daniel Aaron’s *Writers on the Left*

(1961) and Walter Rideout's *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900–1954* (1956), acknowledged this intimate affiliation at the onset of the Great Depression and trace its course over several decades. In the 1930s, Communism attained the standing of a principal force of attraction among intellectuals, but during the Cold War an unrenounced affiliation with the Communist Party resulted in rampant demonization. The hostile trend was prefigured in Eugene Lyons' chronicle *The Red Decade* (1941) and codified in Richard Crossman's anthology *The God That Failed* (1950). After the 1960s, Communism underwent a series of hotly-contested steps toward "normalization," in which Communist policies and practices were re-examined from the perspective of rank-and-file activists and local experience. The impetus for this more sympathetic trend came from a group of New Left historians who challenged the anticommunist perspectives of Theodore Draper, Irving Howe, and Harvey Klehr. Among the primary books that eventually came to express this school are Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States* (1980); Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The Communist Party in World War II* (1982); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (1983); and Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (1989).

Although the pivotal debates about Communism addressed mostly historical and political episodes, scholarship about radical writers was indirectly affected as a constituent of the controversy. Abetting the rethinking of Communism in the 1960s was a spate of memoirs by Left veterans in books and essays by intellectuals such as Matthew Josephson, Malcolm Cowley, Max Eastman, Albert Halper, Josephine Herbst, Granville Hicks, Edward Dahlberg, and Alfred Kazin. These were soon supplemented by an abundance of anthologies such as William O'Neill (ed.), *Echoes of Revolt: The Masses, 1911–1917* (1966); Harvey Swados (ed.), *The American Writer and the Great Depression* (1966); Jack Salzman with Barry Wallenstein (eds.), *Years of Protest: A Collection of American Writings in the 1930s* (1967); Joseph North (ed.), *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties* (1969); and Jack Conroy and Curtis Johnson (eds.), *Writers in Revolt: The Anvil Anthology, 1933–40* (1973).

Another sign that, progressively, Left writing was coming to be treated more systematically as a special arena of US cultural studies could be found in a growing number of dissertation topics on "the proletarian novel," some of which expanded the time frame well beyond the traditional 1930s. A few examples are Kenneth Lee Ledbetter, "The Idea of a Proletarian Novel in America, 1927–39" (University of Illinois, 1963); Robert William Glenn, "Rhetoric and Poetics: The Case of Leftist Fiction and Criticism During the 1930s" (Northwestern University, 1971); Adam J. Fischer, "Formula for Utopia: The American Proletarian Novel, 1930–1959" (University of Massachusetts, 1974); Cheryl Sue Davis, "A Rhetorical Study of Selected Proletarian Novels of the 1930s: Vehicles for Protest and Engines for Change" (University of Utah, 1976); John C. Suggs, "The Influence of Marxist Aesthetics on American Fiction" (University of Kansas, 1978); Calvin Harris, "Twentieth-century American Political Fiction: An Analysis of Proletarian Fiction" (University of Oregon, 1979); and Joel Dudley Wingard, "Toward a Workers' America: The Theory and Practice of the American Proletarian Novel" (Louisiana State University, 1979).

Among the established scholars in the field of United States literature, most of whom had been trained during the Cold War, there were few converts to dramatically rehabilitating the cultural Left. Those academics who sought a reform in literary studies to re-admit Left writers to the curriculum tended to be a younger generation, often emerging from New Left activism of the 1960s and/or under the influence of the burgeoning feminist and “Black Arts” movements. At the outset, their impact was marginal, often tied mainly to developments in Women’s Studies and African-American studies. In due time, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of books devoted to Left writers attained national visibility in the profession – Arnold Rampersad’s two-volume *The Life of Langston Hughes* (1986 and 1988), Cary Nelson’s *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* (1989), Paula Rabinowitz’s *Labor and Desire: Women’s Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (1991), Barbara Foley’s *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in US Proletarian Fiction, 1929–1941* (1993), Douglas Wixson’s *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Mid-Western Literary Radicalism, 1898–1990* (1994), and Michael Denning’s *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1996).

A second element affecting the status of Left writers is the rise and fall of the New Criticism, launched by Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom, with its heavy valorization of the formal features of literary modernism and disparagement of social content. In the post-World War II atmosphere in which the New Criticism became the reigning orthodoxy, Left authors tended to be perceived as thesis and documentary writers, allied with realism and naturalism, thereby subject to disparagement as crude and sentimental. As late as the 1960s, mainly those Leftists for whom a case for modernist complexity could be made – such as Nathanael West and Muriel Rukeyser – escaped neglect as sub-literary. If one’s connections to the Old Left could be downplayed in relation to some other affiliation, or even judged adversarial, the chance for reclamation increased. Thus *Jews without Money* (1930), the work of loyal Communist Mike Gold celebrating *Yiddishkeit*, remained on the margins of literary studies, while Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep* (1934), hostile to *Yiddishkeit* but obscure in its political intent, was enshrined as a Jewish-American classic.

By and by, the dominion of the New Criticism disintegrated as the social climate of the 1960s gave birth to an environment in which matters such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation came to the foreground as arenas for literary disputation. These new perceptions placed writings of many overlooked radicals in a new light, especially since many radical authors were female and African-American. Numerous Left-wing novels were reissued in paperback, and eventually book series were established such as “Novels of the Thirties” at The Feminist Press and “Voices of Resistance” at Monthly Review Press. A climactic event was the Feminist Press publication of *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930–1940* (1987), edited by Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz. Eventually, US literature anthologies themselves would undergo a transformation to incorporate the “rediscovered” writers, most notably *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (1990), under the

direction of Paul Lauter, and the *Norton Anthology of American Poetry* (2000), edited by Cary Nelson.

Further, new conceptual challenges from African-American and feminist studies progressively dislodged the whole category of “modernism” from its strict association with elite writers of the Elliot-Pound-Joyce school. The debate was inaugurated with arguments about why certain female writers and writers of color had been shut out of traditional discussions of modernist writers in the US and among expatriates, with whom they shared many features in common. Next came efforts to rethink modernism as a category that could include Blues lyrics, experiments with oral traditions and colloquial language, perspectives on gender, and a wider range of innovations in form. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, as can be seen in Michael Szalay’s *New Deal Modernism* (2000), the term “modernism” was widely deployed to mean merely mid-century modern culture – including Hollywood extravaganzas and pulp fiction.

Earlier, a resurgence of interest in Marxist aesthetic theory emerged in academe, most unforgettably brought into existence by Fredric Jameson’s *Marxism and Form* (1971). Nevertheless, this neo-Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s evolved parallel to but rarely intersected with explorations of the Left tradition. The focus of the new Marxist literary scholarship was less on historical research into political convictions of writers than theory-driven explorations of the politics of form and the ideology of the text. Even the exhilarating, new activist-oriented radical anthologies, such as Louis Kampf and Paul Lauter, eds., *The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays in the Teaching of English* (1970), dedicated to the imprisoned black radical George Jackson, and Norman Rudich (ed.), *Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in American and the Literary Tradition* (1976), issued by the publishing house of the Far Left journal *Ramparts*, had little to say about the heritage of Left-wing writers.

The legacy of the debates about the “New Historians of American Communism” and the collapse of the New Criticism for scholarship about “Writers on the Left” in the twenty-first century are somewhat contradictory. In general, there continues to be the inherited focus on the three decades in the mid-twentieth century in which the cultural scene was dominated by pro-Soviet Communism, anti-fascism, the battle against Jim Crow racism, and the rise of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. What binds writers of this era together is a relatively common Marxist political vision and networks of organizations, publications, congresses, and writers’ schools customarily initiated and led by the Communist movement.

One trend among academics – a few examples are Douglas Wixson, James Smethurst, Bill Mullen, Paul Sporn, Laura Hapke, and Alan Filreis – is to root their scholarship in rigorous primary research into the basis of art in the particular life and political experiences of the writers; conceptualizations about the cultural movement “trickle up” from the knotty, uneven, contradictory and often messy lives of cultural workers. These scholars, like the preponderance of other academics in recent decades, also study the literary production of the “Old Left” itself through the lens of contemporary involvements with gender, color, and diverse forms of cultural resistance. But another trend – exemplified by Cary Nelson, Walter Kaladjian, Paula Rabinowitz,

Michael Denning, William Maxwell and Barbara Foley – is even more theory-driven, sometimes even employing a post-structuralist and post-modernist vocabulary that ironically recalls the New Critical absorption with semantics. Although they also rely on some new biographical and archival research, the emphasis is on exploring texts, and passages from texts, linked together through common affinities with literary and social theory. The trends complement each other and share a “center” in a relatively coherent Old Left political tradition.

In contrast to the culture in the era of the Old Left, culture in the era of the New Left inclines towards appraisal more in kinship to particular events such as the Vietnam War, or to developments coupled to social movements of “identity” such as the Black Arts movement, feminism, Chicano radicalism, and so forth. Rarely is an overview of such trends presented through the rubric of “The Left,” since no indisputable organizational core, corresponding to the Communist movement, existed after the 1950s. Nevertheless, the impact of the former (the Old Left) is often broached in scholarship about radical writing during and after the 1960s. Sometimes Depression-era writers are invoked for comparative purposes, and other times in regard to denoting the prophetic vision of feminist “foremothers” such as Meridel Le Sueur, and defiant black writers such as Richard Wright.

II. Controversies within the Field

The field of “Writers on the Left” has been animated by a series of internal debates among Left writers themselves, some of which have seeped up into the academy. The most conspicuous began at the time that cultural critics around the Communist movement began to coalesce in the mid-late 1920s in the pages of the *New Masses* and *Daily Worker* in an effort to provide leadership to assist the emergence of a revolutionary movement. In these years, many vital Marxist writings about literature and art had yet to be translated into English, and the victory of the Russian Revolution gave inordinate prestige to doctrines and achievements promulgated by the USSR. The outcome of the early pro-Communist exertions was a provocative but chaotic cultural movement that included “workerist” anti-intellectualism alongside Bohemian avant-garde experimentation.

Most famously, there was in the early Depression a serious effort to produce “proletarian literature,” a partly indigenous trend that seemed to have a connection to the Proletcult faction among Bolsheviks (championed originally by A.A. Bogdanov) and was also parallel to the emerging policy of “socialist realism” that became official doctrine in the USSR. Some pro-Communist writers, such as Jack Conroy, Robert Cantwell, Mike Gold, and Grace Lumpkin, openly embraced the label; others, such as John Dos Passos and John Steinbeck, stood aloof while nonetheless benefitting from the national fascination with the new genre. Also popular was the slogan “Art as a Weapon,” which spoke to the long-standing tradition of political commitment in US culture. Yet pro-Communist novelists such as James T. Farrell and Josephine

Herbst felt that these types of critical watchwords (“Proletarian Literature,” “Art as a Weapon”) opened the door to abuse by encouraging the judgment of culture according to immediate political criteria. Moreover, despite the explicit swipes at modernism in the *New Masses*, a number of pro-Communist poets were profoundly affected by the work of T.S. Elliot and even Ezra Pound.

While it was the national economic crisis after 1929 that created a context in which literature allied with the poor and oppressed would become increasingly attractive, the Communist movement took the initiative in setting up the John Reed Clubs (named in honor of the revolutionary journalist of the World War I years) as a means of organizing and giving voice to emerging Left writers and artists. In other words, Communists did not create the Left literary movement, although Party supporters certainly helped to encourage and organize it. Moreover, scores of little magazines appeared (usually spontaneously) across the country that identified with the Left – *Partisan*, *Partisan Review*, *Left*, *Leftward*, *Anvil*, *Blast*, *Dynamo*, *New Force*, *Prolecult*, *Red Pen*, and so on. Writers did not have to be “duped” into supporting the Party; they desperately looked to it as the embodiment of their hopes for a better world.

Starting in 1935, however, several events transpired that created the basis for a persuasive Left critique of Communist literary policies and practice. Most significant was the call for a Popular Front against fascism, announced by the Seventh Congress of the Communist International. A year previously the leadership of the Communist movement had decided to discontinue the John Reed Clubs in order to inaugurate a different kind of organization that could attract more established writers to the revolutionary Left. Now the new group, the League of American Writers, was transformed into a Left liberal institution that focused on a populist, New Deal agenda, although criticism of the Soviet Union was still not brooked. A year later the Moscow Purge Trials commenced, while at the same time the Spanish Civil War erupted through a revolt of generals against the Republic and backed by Hitler and Mussolini.

The upshot was a triangular pressure right at the heart of the Communist-led Left cultural movement. First, the shift in cultural policy – from proletarian and revolutionary literature before 1935 to a people’s democratic literature in the era of the Popular Front – gave credibility to the accusation that Communists saw aesthetics as mainly the handmaiden of political expediency. The allegation that the Party’s motives were opportunist was further reinforced by the organizational manifestation of the new orientation; the League now aimed at the courting of prominent writers, often from the upper strata, as opposed to developing new voices, often from the lower depths.

Then came the Moscow Trials, which raised equally troubling questions. If the Bolshevik leaders charged by Stalin’s regime as agents of fascism were innocent victims of a frame-up, then the Soviet government must be corrupt to its very roots. On the other hand, if guilty, one was forced to ask, from what kind of human material had the historical Party leadership been forged, if they could so readily be enlisted on behalf of fascism? In some cases, the Party seemed to be using strong-arm tactics to high-pressure intellectuals into signing up to support the Trials, an approach further alienating those who simply wished for more information.

Spain was the most excruciating case of all. With the formation of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, devoted Communists were dying in brutal combat against the forces of international fascism, while the bourgeois democracies sat on their hands. Then came news that the Spanish Communist Party and Soviet agents in Spain were reportedly persecuting anarchists and independent communists, as well as crushing efforts at revolutionary transformation of the property relations. Yet how could one criticize Stalinist tactics without undermining anti-fascist struggles, which clearly were paramount?

For the vast majority of cultural workers on the Left, the combination of the world and national politico-economic crises of the West, and the moral capital of the Russian Revolution, led to the conclusion that the ruling elites of the West, and rival Left groupings, must be lying about Soviet atrocities in Moscow and Spain. A small number of writers, however, declared themselves to be anti-Stalinist Marxists and coalesced around several publications that began to give voice to their concerns between 1936 and the advent of World War II. The oldest of these publications was the *Modern Monthly*, originally the *Modern Quarterly*, edited by the multi-talented writer V.F. Calverton. Calverton's publication had long opened its pages to a range of cultural perspectives, and it had become more specifically a forum for dissidents linked to various Left political factions since Calverton himself broke with the Communist movement in 1933.

More consequential in the long run was the prestige of Trotskyism, transmitted as much through the writings of Leon Trotsky himself as well as through small organizations adhering to his policies. In 1934, the Trotskyist movement had launched an impressive theoretical magazine, *New International*, to which a growing number of intellectuals had been contributing. In late 1937, furthermore, a group of mostly former Communist Party members and sympathizers seized control of the one-time organ of the New York John Reed Club, *Partisan Review*, and pushed it in a revolutionary Leninist but militantly anti-Stalinist direction. Trotsky and Trotskyists were welcome among contributors, and one of the editors, Dwight McDonald, joined the Trotskyist movement. The new *Partisan Review* was given its unique stamp by editors Philip Rahv and William Phillips, who conjoined pre-Stalin Bolshevism and literary modernism as their programmatic locus. Although a shoe-string operation, and under violent attack from the Communist press, the *Partisan Review* drew to its ranks a coterie of literary talent that would transform US literary culture in years to come. The initial cadre included Rahv, Phillips, Edmund Wilson, Mary McCarthy, James T. Farrell, Delmore Schwartz, Lionel Trilling, F.W. Dupee, and Meyer Schapiro.

Much of the subsequent debate within the cultural Left, and a good portion of the scholarship that would address "Writers on the Left," has been informed by this original schism between the post-1937 *Partisan Review* and the cultural leadership of the Communist Party, especially those who wrote for the *New Masses* and *Daily Worker*. Yet in the late 1930s, the impending centrality of this schism would have seemed astonishing for several reasons. First, the writers around *Partisan Review* were mostly unknown (Farrell and Wilson were two exceptions), and unconnected with a large

movement. In addition, many of the criticisms raised in the pages of the new *Partisan Review* had been previously presented by others, including some who remained part of the Communist-led tendency. Finally, the cultural program of *Partisan Review* was unattractive in the long-run with respect to the building of an alternative radical cultural movement. True enough, *Partisan Review's* defense of modernism and of difficult literature, and its opposition to crude political coding, was a necessary step for the development of a Left cultural tendency. In contrast, the pro-Communists mainly gave leeway to experimentalists who were pro-Soviet sympathizers, such as Picasso, Neruda, and Brecht. But among many of the *Partisan Review* contributors, especially as figures such as Farrell were displaced by critics such as Clement Greenberg, there was also a depreciation of working-class literature, an implicit elite Euro-centrism (masked as universalism), an oversimplified disparagement of mass and popular culture, an ingenuous blind spot regarding race and ethnicity, and a paucity of creative writers of genuine talent who were willing to affiliate with a social movement. The ultimate success and triumph of the *Partisan Review* circle as the more influential current in American culture came only after its tenuous connections with mass movements for social change were dissolved. The reversal of fortune – wherein the *New Masses* writers became outcast and marginalized, while the *Partisan Review* writers became ensconced in leading university positions – was a product of the Cold War. For the most part the coterie around Rahv and Phillips abandoned revolutionary politics with the advent of World War II; the journal then assumed a largely apolitical stance except for increasingly ritualistic attacks on Stalinism. But these denunciations were now detached from an earlier sympathy for Left social movements, increasingly remote from the reality of the Communist cultural movement, and largely dependent on older arguments from the pre-World War II context.

As the *Partisan Review* deradicalized, and began receiving subsidies from foundations subsequently linked to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), it was joined by auxiliary deradicalizing writers and readers, as well as others never committed to the Left. By the years of the high Cold War, little positive remained of the original Leninist program, except for an anti-Stalinism now indistinct from Cold War liberalism, and a championing of modernism as a vanguard in a way that seemed preposterous when modernism was the establishment. It is not that the *Partisan Review* program logically evolved into Cold War liberalism, or that it was a hoax from the outset. Like the former Communist writers who joined the mainstream – Granville Hicks, Malcolm Cowley, Newton Arvin, Robert Davis, and so forth – the editors had abandoned their original project and switched to more conventional views, albeit maintaining the continuity of the journal title and some themes.

Yet there are sound reasons for the longevity of interest in the original famous schism between *Partisan Review* and the *New Masses*. First is the powerful component of accuracy in the critique forwarded by the anti-Stalinist Marxists around *Partisan Review* in the late 1930s. While the *Partisan Review* program was certainly deficient in the areas cited above, subsequent scholarship has only confirmed that the central leadership of the US Communist movement was unbreakably tied to the Soviet

leadership (especially in comparison to Communist parties of other countries). Moreover, an examination of critical writings in *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker* confirms that a “functional” and expedient attitude toward cultural work was championed by those critics closest to the Party apparatus until 1956 – V.J. Jerome, John Howard Lawson, A.B. Magil, Milton Howard, and Samuel Sillen. Many of the same concerns as those raised by *Partisan Review* – especially the abuse of the maxim “Art is a weapon” – would be brought up again by writers around the Communist movement in the “Albert Maltz Controversy” after World War II (a debate about a *New Masses* essay by Maltz after Party leader Earl Browder was expelled and the Party became more dogmatic in the face of growing Cold War repression), and once more at the moment of the Khrushchev revelations of Stalin’s crimes in his “Secret Speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956. Yet, at the same time as a fully justified anti-Stalinist critique was powerfully formulated in the late 1930s, further events transpired that weakened some of its cogency. Reiterated year after year, the *Partisan Review* critique assumed some features of a caricature. Most disconcerting to those who took the critique as a revolutionary alternative to Communist policy was the rapid departure of most of the original anti-Stalinist Marxist writers and critics from the Far Left. This raised questions as to whether the critique was truly viable as a Marxist position, or simply a stepping stone to abandoning the Left. The ambiguities partly arise from the death agony of the anti-Stalinist Left over a 12-year period.

After all, in 1937–9 one could discern the beginnings of a genuine counter trend to the Communist movement in literary culture – a circle of writers of genuine talent undecieved by the degeneration of the Russian Revolution yet still committed to the promise of revolutionary socialism. But only a remnant of this inspiring cultural movement persevered by the advent of the war. Moreover, by the end of the 1940s, two of the longest hold-outs of this position, Farrell and Macdonald, were drifting toward Cold War anti-communism. Some younger activists, such as the critic Irving Howe and novelist Harvey Swados, kept alive an independent, if non-revolutionary, socialism in the 1950s, but many of their contemporaries – Saul Bellow, most notably – left the fold entirely.

In the end, the entire trend bequeathed no single book of cultural criticism beyond James T. Farrell’s *A Note on Literary Criticism* (1936) penned under the inspiration of its original Marxist banner, with the possible exceptions of Lionel Trilling’s doctoral dissertation on *Matthew Arnold* (1939) and Edmund Wilson’s eccentric *To the Finland Station* (1940). The only major works of literature produced in tandem with the anti-Stalinist Left at its high point were the first four volumes of Farrell’s Danny O’Neill pentalogy (1936–43) and John Wheelwright’s extraordinary *Political Self-Portrait* (1940). A few other books, such as Mary McCarthy’s *The Company She Keeps* (1942) and *The Oasis* (1949), and Trilling’s *The Middle of the Journey* (1947), reflect the afterglow of that moment. Later, many of the *Partisan Review* coterie, as well as younger readers, became known as “The New York Intellectuals.” A handful of these figures re-radicalized and were active against the war in Vietnam, but by that time the politics and culture of the *Partisan Review* milieu were qualitatively transformed.

Complementing the failure of Left anti-Stalinists after the late 1930s to realize their potential as an alternative to the Communist cultural movement is the changing shape of the Communist movement as a cultural tradition while it evolved and then worked its way into literary history. Although critics close to the Party, and some freelance Marxist theoreticians, certainly held retrograde prejudices against “difficult” literature and adhered to a variety of puritanism noted by their rival Marxist critics, the cultural workers themselves produced art that was rarely reducible to a Party line or even Marxist ideology. To be sure, many wrote discrete stories, poems, agit-prop plays and occasionally even novels that they hoped would address a political question or transmit the experience of a section of the working class into fiction. But an examination of the *oeuvre* of writers over their careers shows a much broader range of concerns. And even the most political of a writer’s works could hardly be free of prior influences – family upbringing, religious training, early literary models, and regional themes. Novels that in the 1930s were perceived as merely “strike” fictions, such as those of Grace Lumpkin and Myra Page, might in later decades be appreciated for their pioneering treatment of gender, race, and class. The lessening of Cold War hostilities allowed a new perspective to be brought to a great deal of literature that had been dismissed because it had been amalgamated to stereotypes that no longer seemed compelling.

Was the Communist-led cultural movement as narrow, dull, and mechanical as it appears in the criticisms of the anti-Stalinist Left? It is hard to imagine how it might grow over the decades and continually replenish itself. Yet that is precisely the story of the Party-led effort: the repeated attraction of talented young men and women, and the departure of most of them following a decade or so. Ten years after the Party’s break with *Partisan Review*, writers such as Norman Mailer and Arthur Miller were part of the Communist movement, if not the Party itself. Even though Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison departed bitterly from Party circles in the mid-1940s, the Party-led cultural movement soon attracted a new generation of black literary talent – Audre Lorde, Lorraine Hansberry, John Oliver Killens, Douglas Turner Ward, Julian Mayfield, Alice Childress, Rosa Guy, and so on. At the height of the Cold War the Party was still nurturing a group of young writers who would make their mark in the 1960s and after – Warren Miller, Jose Yglesias, Helen Yglesias, Eve Merriam, George Hitchcock, Olga Cabral, Alvaro Cardona-Hine, and Naomi Replansky. Even in the 1960s and 1970s, a dynamic role was played by Communist poet Walter Lowenfels, who organized some of the most memorable anthologies of the decade. Another Communist poet, Thomas McGrath, is admired as an indispensable figure whose experimental, complex, and wide-ranging verse defies all conventional images of the tradition, and ironically vindicates the potential for a Marxist modernism aspired to by the early *Partisan Review*.

Other transformations have profusely changed the field of Writers on the Left since the debates of the late 1930s. One is the expansion of the tradition to include writers who left the Communist movement but who remained Left-wing and never embraced anticommunism, such as Tillie Olsen and K.B. Gilden. Another is the redemption of mass culture forms that were once dismissed by the literary establishment as well as by Party publications as escapist and commercial – science fiction, detective fiction, pulp,

young adult literature, popular and historical fiction. The third is the reclamation of unique and talented “serious” pro-Communist writers who hitherto fell between the cracks because they wrote at unusual times or produced works not promoted by the Left – John Sanford, Alexander Saxton, Don Gordon, Guy Endore, William Attaway. A fourth is the recent disclosure of diverse Communist associations for writers not previously so identified – Willard Motley, Jo Sinclair, Lorraine Hansberry, Patricia Highsmith (all of whom, coincidentally, were Gay, Lesbian, or bisexual). A fifth is the close connection between the Communist literary tradition and the origin of ethnic literature and writing by people of color in the US. All of this new research and the application of fresh perspectives dramatically change the field of the Literary Left from the way it was originally perceived and theorized in the late 1930s’ disputations, without diminishing the weight of the initial objections to literary Stalinism as a component of a critical-minded understanding of the tradition.

III. The Future of the Field

Considerable challenges remain for the future of the field. While Michael Denning’s monumental *The Cultural Front* (1996) provides a perspective for a new periodization that visualized the decades from the 1930s to the 1950s as unified, there has yet to be the concomitant filling in of the study of cultural work of the Left beyond the 1930s. The origins of many Euro-American ethnic literatures in the United States – Jewish-American, Polish-American, Italian-American, Irish-American – can be traced back to the Left and its heroic exertions to create a realistic portrait of the working class in all dimensions. Likewise, the anti-racism of the Left created an openness to encouraging the work of a number of writers of color. For example, several key figures in Asian-American literature – especially H.T. Tsiang and Carlos Bulosan – are connected with the Left, as well as pioneering works in Latino literature by authors such as Jesus Colon, Bernado Vegas, Alvaro Cardona-Hine, and Jose Yglesias.

No doubt the greatest lapse is in the area of the second generation of Left-wing African-American writers. Today, black radical writers during the Great Depression and early World War II years are very present in literary histories and biographies. Among the names that come to mind are Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Margaret Walker, Countee Cullen, Arna Bon-temps, William Attaway, Theodore Ward, and Dorothy West. Nonetheless, another generation of extraordinary black talent was around the Communist Party during and after World War II. On account of the devastation of McCarthyism, this group has had a very different destiny. Apart from Ann Petry, Audre Lorde, and Lorraine Hansberry, whose standing is considerably connected to the rise in status of select women writers after the 1960s, the names of those whose careers are disparately tied to the late 1940s and 1950s pro-Communist Left are less well-known. Writers such as John Oliver Killens, Julian Mayfield, Willard Motley, Rosa Guy, Shirley Graham, Lloyd Brown, Sarah Wright, Lance Jeffers, Frank Marshall Davis, Alice Childress, Douglas Turner Ward,

and Lonnie Elder III, are all but invisible in histories of cultural radicalism and notably missing in standard anthologies such as the 1997 *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*.

Finally, there is the need for a requisite methodology to address a temporal expansion of the field beyond the Old Left. As we have seen, the field has traditionally focused on the period prior to the 1960s when "The Left" meant the Old Left, and when there was a coherent set of markers establishing the boundaries of a tradition. These include an attraction to Marxism (most often its pro-Soviet version), opposition to rising fascist movements in Europe, support for the CIO, opposition to Jim Crow racism, and so on. Although internal debates among Marxist cultural workers have been contentious, and recent academics have taken diverse methodological approaches, there has at least been a locus of key texts and pivotal problems shared by most of those working in the field.

In contrast, scholarship about Left writers and cultural workers after the 1960s has lacked a corresponding center, and therefore the challenge to create a new methodology has been far greater. It is here that one radical scholar, T.V. Reed, has come to the fore to present a striking argument about affiliations between radical political activity and literary theory. In his first book, *Fifteen Jugglers, Five Believers* (1992), Reed inaugurates his approach of reading social trends symptomatically in literature and diverse cultural forms, while also demonstrating that the cultural forms, in return, assist in shaping politics and society. True enough, some of the authors treated in his book – James Agee, Ralph Ellison, Norman Mailer – have backgrounds suggesting a strong connection with the "Old Left," but Reed's methodology of using questions raised by literary theorists to illuminate social movements links their books very much to contemporary concerns. Reed's subsequent book, *Social Movements and the Arts of Change* (2003), advances this approach in a variety of ways. First, Reed's focus has moved away from parallel relations between movements and texts, narrowing in on cultural work produced in and for particular social movements. Second, Reed is more centered on the New Left, even though he traces the evolution of some anterior forms (spirituals) rooted in earlier periods. Third, his reach is more interdisciplinary, engaging music, cinema, and murals, as well as poetry and drama.

Reed's paradigm, although it is just one among a variety of possibilities and leans very much toward the theory-driven trend, augurs a new stage of study of Writers on the Left that approaches the later decades of the twentieth century by means of a comparative study of social movements under the rubric of multi-ethnic cultural studies. In this respect, he has pointed to a central theme of the scholarship on the post-1960s' Cultural Left that is wending its way into print, and that will be seen in forthcoming scholarship by those who continue to till the vineyard of US literary radicalism.

Reconstructing the full scope of the cultural Left in the post-1960s years is truly a daunting project. If thoroughly researched and carried out on the highest plane of sophisticated analysis, we have the possibility of whole new phase of scholarship that will positively recast our understanding of culture in the second half of the twentieth century and retrospectively improve our grasp of what occurred in the first half. The

unearthing and reconstruction of large amounts of empirical evidence about Left cultural practice beyond various outdated, conservative canons and borders, which then ought to result in extraordinary new and persuasive theorizations, will permanently dethrone the narrow and partial versions of literary history that have hitherto held sway in academe. Not only such specific phenomena as the Black Arts movement, and the continuation of working-class cultural production up to the present, but the full breadth of Left-wing cultural practice in all regions of the country, and in numerous subcultures and neglected cities, will be restored to their rightful place as a dynamic force in the making of modern US literary culture.

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From Objectivism to the Haight

Charles Molesworth

In “America,” his send up of Chamber of Commerce boosterism, Allen Ginsberg epitomizes the Beat sensibility at its most ironic when he proclaims at the end of the poem, “America I am putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.” There are several echoes here. One recalls pioneer hardiness, as the shoulder to the wheel conveys the image of people pushing covered wagons out of muddy ruts. There is also the tone of personal testament reminiscent of Puritan conversion narratives, with the address to a transcendent force. And, of course, Ginsberg slyly acknowledges his marginal status as a homosexual addressing his mainstream compatriots. But out of this matrix of tones and gestures comes an overriding irony as the poet takes a cliché idiom and uses it to subvert America’s notorious Protestant work ethic. By pretending to stand in that mainstream ethos, Ginsberg uses his marginalized status not only to mock the dominant culture of mid-twentieth-century America, but also to suggest that its means of social policing are ineffective. After all, if the person next to you is working hard, you can hardly treat him or her as an outcast. But that doesn’t eliminate his difference.

This complex irony on Ginsberg’s part does not, however, exhaust the Beat sensibility. In various ways, that sensibility included a wanderlust, a rapturous love of nature, a personal ethos based on sexual and psychological liberation, a tendency to depression and fatalism, a fascination with the obscurantist tradition, and a profound mistrust of the kinds of sentimentality usually associated with national or civic pride. This mix was enlivened in its expression by an embrace of modernist culture and the primitivism that was one of its more lasting ingredients. The word “Beat” itself has been glossed to mean not just defeated or outcast, but also beatified and transcendent. The Beat poets mixed together Eastern mysticism, indigenous American anarchism, and literary experimentalism with an improvisational flavor to create a writing style that became indistinguishable from a life-style. The life-style earned them much notoriety, resulting in the quaintly derogatory term, “beatnik.” Though staunchly opposed to many of the attitudes associated with mass society, the Beats were nevertheless

frequently pictured through the lens of the mass media. Eventually the poets came to realize that that lens was part of the problem.

In the decades following World War II, America life was transformed by two immense developments: the Cold War and the rise of a consumerist society (see chapter 5). These combined in complex ways to create certain dispositions towards seeing threats everywhere, even while material abundance was expanding rapidly. The Beats felt especially keenly the distortions in attitudes that were brought about by rampant consumerism. They also felt that the militaristic foreign policy of the government was conducted in a way that was unresponsive to the best instincts of the American people. Conformity and boosterism were everywhere. The awesome productive power of American industry had slowly but convincingly been harnessed by a revolution in managerial techniques that was on its way to making the culture of the business corporation the acme of the national culture. The mass media appeared complicit in this distortion of values and perspective, since it was little more than an extension of corporate managerial values.

That same media was almost totally oblivious to the ironic complexity of Ginsberg and the literary qualities of his fellow poets, Gary Snyder, Robert Creeley, Philip Whalen, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Robert Duncan, Michael McClure, Diane di Prima, Kenneth Rexroth, Gregory Corso, Philip Lamantia, and others. In newspapers and popular magazines, the Beats were characterized as rootless and unproductive. When, in 1956, Ferlinghetti was charged with distributing “indecent material” – he had published and offered for sale Ginsberg’s “Howl” – the moral battle lines were drawn. Even supposedly well-educated literary critics, such as Norman Podhoretz, could refer to the Beats as writing poems that “descend to the level of puerile sniveling and self-righteous braggadocio” (Podhoretz, 1967). The case was decided in favor of Ferlinghetti, but if the trial had been held in a city other than San Francisco, the outcome might have been very different. But City Lights Books, the book store and publishing house owned by Ferlinghetti, became a focal point for a new style of poetry. Since many of the Beat poets were often associated with the city where they lived or first published their poetry, they are also known as the writers of the San Francisco Renaissance. The city that lent them another, more proper literary-historical rubric, had a long tradition of bohemianism and West Coast insouciance, and they were happy to be known as its sons and daughters.

But belonging to any tradition or institution – geographically or culturally based – was a key issue for these writers. Though they tilted against the dominant mores, they needed a fulcrum point on which to rest their claims of a more innocent trustworthiness and a higher set of beliefs. They found this, to some extent, in the modernist poetics called Objectivism. Objectivism was formulated by George Oppen and Louis Zukofsky. Oppen once remarked that there are objects and perceptions of objects, and that was enough theology for him. Oppen also said that “the poem is concerned with a fact that it did not create,” and Zukofsky added in a similar vein that the poem “thinks with things as they exist” (Heller, 1985). This commitment to a direct treatment of things, stripped of any excess, especially accumulated poeticisms, in turn was a strong

impulse that had originated with Ezra Pound. Pound's Imagism was a movement that flourished briefly just before World War I, but its influence continued pervasively throughout the following century. Though often looked at in terms of the pyrotechnics, scandals, and gossip such movements often occasion, Imagism and Objectivism both tried to reconstruct the basis of literary culture. This, their practitioners soon discovered, meant looking for the prospects of a new social order as well. Beat poetry is related to these earlier "schools" not only because of personal contacts among the principals but because it, too, wanted to imagine a new form of poetry and a new form of social relations.

If seen mainly as a reaction against previous styles, Objectivism completes the turning away from Victorian sentimentality. The movement was set against English culture generally, and it was part of a compelling idealization of American cultural autonomy, at a moment in the first third of the twentieth century when such ideals were highly prized. When viewed as a positive attachment, it can be understood as an expression of the most enduring of American philosophies, pragmatism. It will help to remember that pragmatism was called "instrumentalism" by one of its chief adherents, John Dewey. This emphasis on objects and tools and the habits and ends by which they are mastered and put to use tracks onto a concern with poetry as a language of sharply presented images shorn of any decorative or concealing details. The Beats would always exhibit a flair for Romantic gestures, and some of them, such as Gregory Corso, would cultivate their image as latter-day Shelleys. But they had nevertheless a strong and intimate relation with their American roots. This meant, among other things, that they valued the plain style when it could be used forcefully, and they felt that fancy words will often tell against those who use them only to appear polite.

Oppen and his fellow Objectivists, Zukofsky, Carl Rakoski, Lorine Niedecker, and Charles Reznikoff operated outside the American literary establishment in the decades before and after World War II, publishing almost exclusively in little magazines and developing their theories through extended correspondences with one another and occasional self-appointed disciples. The San Francisco Renaissance poets shared this reliance on communication and cooperation through the use of personal networks and affinity groups. Both groups had a commitment to political and social values, and often these were translated into poetic strategies as well. In its most diffuse sense, this translation was about a spirit, a sense that Pound's famous slogan, "Make it new," could not be restricted merely to the way language was used. Or rather, they saw that the way language habitually formed a world view raised the possibility that new visions and new words went together, and you could start with either poetry or politics and, if pursued with the right discipline, one always led to the other.

The idea of a discipline might seem strange to those commentators and media pundits who saw the Beats as ill-kempt and foul-mouthed social parasites. It was not only the rigors of Oppen's and Reznikoff's vocabulary and syntax that led Ginsberg and Snyder to practice their craft in a disciplined way. There was also the abiding influence of Eastern philosophy and mysticism. Ginsberg read widely and deeply in the literature

of this complex culture, and Snyder was for over a decade a practicing Buddhist monk. The discipline of *zazen*, which involved long hours of meditation and organized breathing, entered into the poetics of Beat writing, first as a physical conditioning and then as a spiritual practice. Some of the Beats were less focused on such rigors, to be sure, and substituted a regimen of excess for that of discipline, turning to psychedelic drugs as a form of spiritual illumination. It was this use of drugs that brought some of the poets into contact with the burgeoning psychedelic culture associated with the Haight neighborhood in San Francisco. It was in the Haight, or Haight-Ashbury as it was more commonly known, that new music, fashion, and sexuality flourished in an atmosphere of anti-establishment revelation and blissed-out excess. Such bliss was a version of a distinct strain in Buddhist thought, which stressed that excess could as easily provide a transforming vision as any ascetic undertaking; the key in each instance was the willingness to travel beyond the borders of everyday life and overly habituated sensations.

Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder

In some ways the San Francisco Renaissance began in the halls of Columbia University in New York City. It was there that Ginsberg, whose father was a traditional rhyming poet and whose paranoid mother ended in an asylum, first began friendships that introduced him to a *demimonde* of drugs and criminal activities. But he soon saw that the various forms of education offered by New York and college life had to be completed elsewhere. This meant not only trips to the West Coast, but also eventually travel in the Yucatan, India, and points further afield. But he took with him on these travels the new vision that he had formed by means of a mystical experience. Ginsberg tells the story, in a *Paris Review* interview, of how the voice of the Ancient of Days spoke to him in the person of William Blake. What he was able to take from this visionary moment was the knowledge that time and space were not absolute boundaries, and this led to a trust in the transcendence of certain kinds of wisdom and the special burdens of being a member of the fellowship of poets. But this lofty insight brought with it an increased sense that it was in the materiality of our lives – bodied and mortal and common – that we would find the best analysis of our ills and the inevitable cure for them.

One of the fullest statements of Ginsberg's poetic vision, and the theory that helps to explain it, is "Sunflower Sutra" (Ginsberg, 1980: 139). The poem takes place in the company of Ginsberg's friend and lover, the novelist Jack Kerouac, and in a grimy railroad yard, where Kerouac calls the poet's attention to a sunflower. The flower, "poised against the sunset, crackly bleak and dusty with the smut and smog and smoke of olden locomotives in its eye," becomes the metaphor for the poet's soul. This, of course, follows in the Romantic tradition of Keats's nightingale and Shelley's skylark. But what it issues in is quite different. At the end of the poem, the poet is led to deliver a short "sermon to my soul, and Jack's soul too, and anyone who'll listen." The sermon

reiterates the core of all mystical wisdom, but does so in a prose like format that contains a new kind of poetic music, based largely on an embrace of images:

We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all golden sunflowers inside, blessed by our own seed & hairy naked accomplishment – bodies growing into mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sitdown vision.

Here the last image is a 10-word phrase that has nine qualifiers and one noun, and of those nine qualifiers six are actually nouns themselves. The image complex here is the key to Ginsberg's special sense of a visionary poetics, as it is firmly rooted in the object world. It is an image that is American in its materiality and its diversity, its sense of place and borders, and its syntactical democracy.

American poetry in 1955, at the time Ginsberg wrote "Sunflower Sutra," was dominated by an academic style, which relied on rhymes, formal stanzaic structures, and controlled diction. The cultural force of Ginsberg's poetry has to be measured against such a style and its historical moment. Just to use the word "sutra" in a poem's title invited charges of obscurantism or self-indulgent exoticism. Poets who were known as academic often argued that poetry and politics should never mix, since the former had to remain disinterested in order to achieve the realm of beauty, and the world of politics was bound to sully anything of beauty. The Beat poets were often discussed as if they lacked all sense of beauty and the more traditional ways in which it had been invoked. But some readers would easily recognize in Ginsberg's language the presence of Walt Whitman. That presence was registered not only in the aggressive use of free verse, but in the poem's materialistic utopianism. There were soon to be yet more echoes of Whitman in Ginsberg's poetry, as he turned directly to social topics. A large number of poems began to be derived from Ginsberg's travels, in America and the worlds beyond. The content of these could also be seen as defying the dominant conventions of academic poetry, as Ginsberg began to introduce sociological and even anthropological issues into his work. By 1966, this tendency culminates in what is perhaps his greatest poem, "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (Ginsberg, 1980: 394).

By the late 1960s the United States Army was increasingly involved in a disastrous armed conflict in Southeast Asia, a conflict which soon uncovered strong opposition in the streets of America. "Wichita Vortex Sutra" was Ginsberg's response. He saw Wichita, Kansas, as the heart of the country, the place where all the vortical forces brought into clear view the many ugly and hidden strains in American society and the blindly destructive foreign policy fostered by its political system. The poem proceeds in part as if it is the moving picture taken from the window of an automobile, covering day after day the expanses of the heartland. Attempting to render justice to the great diversity of American locales and habits, Ginsberg reaches into the controlling center, the vortex, out of which the national culture endlessly spins. As with his sunflower poem, Ginsberg uses the sutra as a structuring device, a meditation aimed at a higher wisdom.

Only by turning to a non-Western form might the truth be uncovered, a truth that lies hidden beneath a habitual misuse of language. As for the language itself, it had to be cleansed of all the commercial and cynical distortions that result when not only politicians, but advertisers and the media moguls, poison the well-springs of democracy. In this poem Ginsberg's political pessimism matches that of Whitman in the darkest moments of his "Democratic Vistas." As with the Whitmanian "barbaric yawp," Ginsberg turns to language itself to cure the linguistic disease, and calls on the country's founding document to reassert its values.

A lone man talking to himself, no house in the brown distance to hear,
 imaging the throng of Selves
 languaged by Declaration as
 Happiness!
 I call all powers of imagination
 To my side . . . to make Prophecy

In a daringly utopian gesture at the end of the poem, Ginsberg declares the war is over, though in the misfortune of reality it had another ten merciless years to run.

Ginsberg's anti-war stance was shared by many other poets at the time. But few of them lent their entire poetic will to opposing not only the war but the war-making culture that had spawned it. Ginsberg's poetry became increasingly dedicated to uncovering the conspiracies by which the FBI, the CIA, and even local police forces worked against the liberty they were presumed to be protecting. By the middle of the 1960s the Cold War had become a series of proxy wars where the United States was bent on containing the Soviet Union, even if it meant fighting against wars of national liberation. Ginsberg saw this as a form of American imperialism, and it had to be opposed constantly, at every turn. His later poems were sometimes modeled like diary entries, and beginning with his expulsion for antisocial activities from the Czech Republic in 1965, where he had been named the King of the May festival by university students, he was bent on talking about power structures. His FBI file began to swell, and he was a fixture at rallies while his name was often found among the signers of petitions. Famously photographed wearing a stovepipe hat with an American flag pasted on it, he survived becoming a popular culture icon and continued to develop as a poet. As with his famous early poems, "Kaddish" and "Howl," the elevation of a poetically infused paranoia to the level of a life-affirming vision induced Ginsberg to question every official truth and cross every legitimate border. But he always did so by invoking, not only the voice of prophecy and the powers of imagination, but what he considered the truly enlightened traditions of thought and value.

When it comes to enlightenment, many poets would prefer to seek ecstasy. But some, like Gary Snyder, see the two goals as compatible. Snyder looks to poetry as a form of wisdom literature, but he prefers to see it cast in a homespun idiom. One of his shorter poems says, "When the river is low, we heap stones; when the river is high, we sing songs." Our commonality is most truly realized in the work we share, the real

work of relating to our environment by reaffirming our most productive values. Snyder has always been very clear about his poetic values:

As a poet, I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the upper Paleolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe.

(Snyder, 1978)

Though this formulation obviously reaches back into history, and even pre-history, Snyder has been anything but a poet of retreat. His major commitments led him to become an early formulator of an ethic based on ecology. His book on the philosophy and practical issues involved in the ecological movement, *Earth House Hold*, sold over 60,000 copies. He came to this deep sense of the earth's fragility and interrelatedness in part as a result of his studies in Zen Buddhism, and, later, his study of the cultures of indigenous peoples, especially Native Americans. Having begun in the field of comparative literature and anthropology while a student at Reed College, in Portland, Oregon, Snyder furthered his education by becoming an expert trailsman and mountain hiker. He shows up in Kerouac's *roman à clef*, *The Dharma Bums*, as a character called Japhy Ryder. Japhy tells the skittish greenhorn narrator of the novel that there is an old Zen saying: When you get to the top of the mountain, keep climbing. Later, the narrator sees Japhy running down the mountain and has a sudden *satori*, or illumination, when he realizes that you can't fall off the mountain. Snyder's poetry is often about going to the limit and beyond, and returning to simple, well grounded truths.

As a poet, Snyder is perhaps the purest descendant of the Objectivist tradition. His approach to objects is radically indebted to his sense of nature's wholeness, a sense formed both by his Buddhism and his experience of the American wilderness. Snyder has even wryly suggested that the most urgently needed changes in America's political culture would come about by increasing the National Park system and having trees and wild animals represented in Congress. He knows, of course, this would necessitate a revolutionary change in human consciousness about our place in the created universe, but he also suggests this is the only revolution that finally matters. In a poem like "Burning the Small Dead" (Snyder, 1968) the use of images to structure the path through to a new consciousness is distinctively egoless and lyrical:

Burning the small dead
branches
broke from beneath
thick spreading
whitebark pine

a hundred summers
snowmelt rock and air
hiss in a twisted bough.

sierra granite;
 mt. Ritter –
 black rock twice as old.

Deneb, Altair
 windy fire

Like a series of interlocking haiku, the poem explores various states of matter, seeing in the tree's bark the elements that are also in the granite, and hearing in the fire's hiss the moisture of the snow. All of these processes reach into stages of growth and change over time, and recall the fundamental elements of the distant stars, Deneb and Altair, which are imagined as nothing but "windy fire." The last image, in true modernist fashion, can also be self-reflexively read as a metaphor for poetic consciousness.

From the start Snyder made poems by using words as if they were natural objects. In a later volume, *Regarding Wave*, Snyder was able to move back and forth between his domestic affections, his sense of political justice and historical development, and his ritualized participation in the energies of nature. His political sensibilities are close to those of the Wobblies, members of the old Industrial Workers of the World, whose views Snyder first encountered when working as a lumberman in the Pacific northwest. A man of considerable gentleness, Snyder lived for many years on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains, in a house he built with his own hands. His neighbors and visitors included many of the Beat poets, such as Philip Whalen, Lew Welch, and Philip Lamantia. Like Ginsberg, Snyder has taken a teaching job in a university during recent years, but continues to write poetry and essays in defense of his values. His masterwork may be "Mountains and Rivers without End," a long poem heavily indebted to Pound and the Objectivist tradition.

A Gathering of Beats

There are many other Beat poets who borrow more or less directly from the spectrum of influences that define the literary heritage drawn on by Ginsberg and Snyder. Most of them were eager to be associated with the "school" of Beat poetry, despite the anti-nomian impulses often found in American poets. But they also pursued diverse literary agendas. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, for example, speaks a knowing yet straight-shouldered idiom based in large measure on the oral tradition and could include bright moments of heavy irony, wry humor and nostalgic sentiment. In his essay, "Genesis of 'After the Cries of the Birds'" (Allen, 1973), he speaks openly in a stream of consciousness mode about how he came to write this poem. The creative process is at once haltingly diffident and willfully focused:

Nevertheless! The first trembling steps in the direction of the Dharma taken then in those woods, below those far hills & mountains, on that beach, as if dumb unborn poem were still to be discovered wherever I had not looked before on this Far Shore . . . mind's

Guernicas left far behind, moon's Cuernavacas still possible, civilization and its crickets still up the coastal highway . . . San Francisco rising white out of flat plains of its peninsula racked with freeways & defense plant suburbs, napalm made among the palms . . .

(p. 32)

Here, as is often the case in Ginsberg and Snyder, the poem and those acts of the mind that encourage and conserve the process of the poem become the same. The poem itself focuses on a vision like that of the early Puritans' "city on a hill," but in the miasma of Cold War America, the vision is more than tarnished. But a transforming hope manages to drive the poem on, even when the consequences are unclear: "Western Civilization gone too far West / might suffer a sea change / into Something Else Eastern / and that won't do / The Chinese are coming anyway." America's place in the world order is no longer stable, and the once limitless national frontier has become a place of incalculable changes. But the poem ends on an apocalyptic note, counterpointed by wise-guy humor in the best demotic tradition:

San Francisco floats away
beyond the three-mile limit
of the District of Eternal Revenue
No need to pay your taxes
The seas come in to cover us
Agape we are & agape we'll be

Ferlinghetti puns on the Latin meaning of the word *agape*, which means divine love. (He is, in fact, the holder of a doctorate from the Sorbonne.) The poet ends by mixing the transcendent and the marvelous, even, or especially, in the face of some very final vision.

An urban sense of loss and alienation recurs frequently in the Beats, for their mixture of bohemianism and cosmopolitanism, sometimes known as "hip," came from a love-hate relationship with city life. Lew Welch, for example, echoes some of the urban grit of Ginsberg's "Howl":

In the mills and refineries of its south side Chicago
passes its natural gas in flames
Bouncing like bunsens from stacks a hundred feet high.
The stench stabs at your eyeballs.
The whole sky green and yellow backdrop for the skeleton
steel of a bombed-out town.

(Charters, 1971)

The city is the locale of what the sociologists call anomie, a weakening of purpose and spirit that causes one to accept an unthinkable level of frustration. Mass society is not for the Beats so much the enemy as it is the victim of its own cultural frameworks. The solutions to the problems are almost as unthinkable as the frustrations. When the

Beats were able to see a way through they were tempted by violence and anarchism, but they almost always settled for a cultural revolt. This revolt was underpinned by changing the social units or principles of grouping. Some Beats responded simply by taking up a life of vagabondage, or at least praising its virtues. For Snyder the new social imagination meant tribalism, as he drew on the Native American tradition to conceive a poetics of culture that would “give access to persons – cutting away the fear and reserve and camping of social life”(Perkins, 1987: 543). What this often meant in practice was the reliance on an affinity group. What came to be known as the “hipster” was a personality type who thrived in small groups that shared a tacit understanding of what was at stake in their rejection of the dominant values. To cite Snyder again, he often referred to the old Wobbly notion of “building the new society in the shell of the old.” Closely shared values meant both a premium on coded talk and a taciturn respect for the fragility of all recognitions. As a result Beat poetry flourished in small magazines. It also explains why an anthology such as Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry* (1960) could have such an impact. Robert Creeley has remarked on how seeing his fellow poets all together in print for the first time gave him a sense of solidity and placement that he had never before felt as strongly.

Not every aspect of the Beats’s social attitudes was purely progressive. The social and sexual experimentation among the group led to a distinctive set of attitudes towards women. The Beats included several talented women poets, though they seldom received the same attention as the men. And the men often treated them more as muses or easy lovers than as artistic equals. The women, for their part, coming as they did between the suffragists of the 1920s and the second wave of feminism that began in the late 1970s, did not usually speak out on issues of gender inequality. But they were vocal in other ways. Diane di Prima was prolific, and very active in social and political protests. In one of her poems, “Rant,” she says that the only war that matters is the war against the imagination. Joanne Kyger was married for almost a decade to Gary Snyder, and her Zen-influenced poetry somewhat resembles his, though she continued to write and publish after their divorce in 1966. Madeline Gleason and Josephine Miles were both of an earlier generation, but they served as teachers and steady influences in the Berkeley area poetry scene for years. Elise Cowen was a precocious young poet who was very close to Ginsberg in New York, but she tragically committed suicide in 1962, before her 30th birthday. The memoirs of some of the women, such as Joyce Johnson and di Prima, give fresh and perceptive accounts of the movement.

The Beats favored another social type, the guru. Since many of the Beats believed in a form of enlightenment, they also felt that a true seeker after such an exalted state needed a guide. The guru, a figure common in Eastern mysticism, would be a guide in selecting the books one would read, and in setting out and monitoring spiritual exercises. Often, in its American version, the instruction between guru and disciple turned out to be a two-way flow. Kenneth Rexroth acted in the role of guru for a number of San Francisco poets. He was steeped in the traditions of American anarchism, and his opinionated prose never relied on refined categories or placid historical schemes. His poetry was powerfully influenced by the traditions of Eastern writing, especially the

haiku. In a poem that mourns his wife's death, Rexroth begins with a simple meditation on the spring scene in front of him, hardly mentioning the ostensible subject of the poem. By the end of the poem we have only images strung together so that their echoes carry the theme of transience, continuity and remembrance to a subtle conclusion.

We thought the years would last forever,
They are all gone now, the days
We thought would come for us are here.
Bright trout poised in the current –
The raccoon's track at the water's edge –
A bittern booming in the distance –
Your ashes scattered on the mountain –
Moving seaward on the stream.

The note of patient acceptance here clearly echoes Zen, and is far removed from the note of revolt often, perhaps too often, pointed to as characteristic of the Beats. But Rexroth was at once a stern and loving master, spending large bundles of energy promoting other poets and using his house and his conviviality as pivotal points in the San Francisco scene.

American sociologists have spoken about the distinction between networks, often local and based on affinities, and systems, which are more impersonal and extensive. The suburb typifies the social system that the Beats reacted against. Being spread out and uniform, with all the underlying forms of subordination and exploitation hidden from view, the suburban dweller epitomizes passive anonymity. The Beat poet, on the other hand, delights in the prickliness of personality, even at its most cumbersome and embarrassing. Gregory Corso's "Marriage" (Charters, 1992: 179) is at once a parody of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and an excruciating version of an American ritual where the prospective groom is made to experience his erotic longing as a form of shame. The poem's speaker is clearly out of place among the niceties of polite society, and the only thing he has to offer in his own defense is his exacerbated sensibility. Yet his hyper-awareness of the arbitrary and inane details of the situation make him a sort of heroic figure whose triumph is comically invisible to others.

For every note of urban malaise sounded by the Beats there is an animal cry of wonder or agony. As far down as their depressions might have led them, the Beats wished to travel a commensurate distance above the limits of convention. Michael McClure embodies this longing to go beyond as ferociously more than any other Beat poet. Everything he writes reads like a manifesto. Indeed, in an essay called "Revolt," he offers a challenge to the ordinary understanding of the word, seeking to move its meaning beyond any sense of a singular historical event.

There is no solution in a method of revolt. Revolt can't be practiced by method for it is ever changing. And revolt is no answer but a LIFE of the spirit and body.

Revolt necessitates destruction. Revolt must destroy the extraneous if we are to act in freedom. If the irrelevant had been managed and handled then the need for revolt would not accumulate. The self in the spirit becomes weighted with meaninglessness. The self must have a history and the history IS the body – the actions of the body made at all times.

(Allen, 1973)

The antinomian strain in American culture is clearly present here, as even the revolutionary impulses cannot be subject to any routinization. Furthermore, the spirit of revolt has to be literally embodied, brought back to a somatic dimension, where it is presumably less likely to be betrayed. In all of American modernism, there is no one else who so consistently questions the very fundamental elements of culture itself as does McClure. His writing combines the tones of wisdom literature, dadaistic attacks on convention, the rhetorical vehemence of certain obscurantist texts, and another-worldly utopianism. He is unique in his development of this mixture, and hence is little read outside of a specifically Beat context, and has enjoyed few disciples. Yet his work contains an important dimension of the spirit of Beat poetry. One of his poems pushes beyond the Objectivist focus on objects by invoking something like a transubstantiating principle. The poem uses an Anglo-Saxon compound word, *aelf-scin*, which literally means “elf light,” to set the context.

The moment I

leave what I am in aelf-scin. Stand
in wonder. Lose myself. Even to fear.
A difference. Aelf-scin, Weir. But
similar. Knowing its name the horror
of void is gone. Knowing it almost
with my ash spear over my arm in the black
FOREST CLEAR WATER AND SEA AIR

Ecstasy and terror combine to produce what seems like a destructive wonder, though there seems to be some resolution in the end: “CALL IT FEAR NOW-GONE / the whole thing a star / breathing.” Here the transcendent, beatified sense of the word “Beat” is clearly in play. McClure’s highly theatrical readings of his poetry are like shamanistic rituals, and his performative esthetic borrows considerable energy from his Beat disposition.

The performative aspects of McClure’s poetry was something shared by other Beat poets. Many of the Beats insisted on the importance of improvisation, and Ginsberg himself had a formula that said, “First thought, best thought.” This strain of the Beat esthetic was related to a larger American interest in the importance of process over product. The former was fluid and searching, while the latter tended to be settled and safe. A number of older poets, such as William Carlos Williams, had spent considerable energy developing this approach to writing. But the Beats also found a source for it in jazz. It was the jazz musician, especially of the be-bop style, like Charlie

Parker and Miles Davis, who supplied the Beats with the model of the hipster, with all the connotations of a nocturnal, free-wheeling, exploratory and cultish approach to art and culture. The public, again led by the mass media, tended to see the Beats as those people who read their poems in front of jazz ensembles in smoke-filled basement clubs. There were in fact many poetry-and-jazz evenings in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and other large cities. But what the mainstream public didn't appreciate was how extemporaneous many of these events were, and how expressive of esthetic values that were related to progressive social attitudes. Instead, the public usually saw only an overstylized media distortion.

Another way in which the performative aspects of Beat writing manifested itself was in the breakdown of the distinction between poetry and prose. As was clear from the above prose excerpts from McClure and Ferlinghetti, the Beat sense of prose was that it should be as spontaneous and lyrical as free verse. Conversely, the free verse of the Beats often looked and read as if modeled on prose rhythms and formats. The intimacies of perception and psychic energies were elusive, and any net that might catch them had to be employed or adapted. Some of the more revered sources for these poets were the prose poems of Charles Baudelaire, and the innovative work of Arthur Rimbaud, especially his *Illuminations*, with its long incantatory lines. But the fact is that the normal generic divide between poetry and prose, which represented an official or academic approach to literature, was simply not something that concerned the Beats very much. They tended to mix genres readily, and perhaps the journal was their most favored form. (It was, in fact, the confiscation of his journal by the Czech authorities that led to Ginsberg's expulsion from Prague.) Like Thoreau, whose influence they all felt, the Beats kept journals not only for the sense of self-reflection they occasion but to preserve the immediately lived experience and to better understand the process by which it was transformed into poetry.

The Black Mountain Poets

The Beats were not alone in their attitudes and devotions to a new way of writing poetry. Another group of poets, known as the Black Mountain poets, shared many of the assumptions and practices of the Beats. Named after a small experimental college in North Carolina that some of them attended in the 1950s, this group developed an elaborate theory of poetry built on attention to the bodily processes – called proprioception – that one undergoes in the act of writing or speaking poetry. These processes were often focused on the breath that a poet uses when constructing the line of the poem, and so they are sometimes referred to as the “breath line” poets. The theory was most notably set out by Charles Olson, in an essay called “Projective Verse.” Olson was a guru-like figure, a large, imposing man with all the charisma, and some of the obscurantism, of the autodidact. His influence was strongly taken in by Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, and Robert Duncan, among others, all of whom praised him in passionate terms, though their own poetries remained distinctly their own.

Olson's poetry is largely contained in his *Maximus Poems*, an epic-length work written in the polyvocal identity of Maximus, and resembling Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. Using a dazzling collage of historical and archeological material, Olson probes the cultural imagination in broad terms, but always with an insistently detailed set of interrelated images and symbols. The surface, so to speak, of an Olson poem often appears as a jagged mosaic of facts, quotations, snatches of songs or texts, and scores of cryptic allusions. These include much prehistoric material, mythologies from a vast array of sources, occult literature, the Homeric corpus, and a host of specific mentions about Gloucester and Cape Ann, Massachusetts, where Olson lived for many years. It is hard to imagine anyone but Olson himself (or perhaps one of his fellow poets who had been in correspondence with him) reading the poem without an elaborate reference guide. Closest to him in style and matter is Robert Duncan, who is, if anything, even more drawn to occult and obscurantist traditions. In fact, Duncan lived in San Francisco for much of his life, and he served as a link between the Beats and the Black Mountain poets, being a rather reclusive person with a strong attachment to both affinity groups. Duncan advances a theory of poetry that equates it with wisdom literature, and in practice he writes a very lyrical free verse line that has echoes of late Romanticism. As with Olson, Duncan's diverse interests in texts of all kinds works its way into his poetry, creating a palimpsest of references and a counterpoint of echoes that are always focused on some kind of metaphoric or spiritual transformation.

But it is the poet Robert Creeley who in a striking way participates most fully in both the Beat and Black Mountain schools. He was educated at Harvard, but spent most of his life associated with avant-garde writers, artists and musicians. One critic has referred to Creeley as an "unsure egoist." This refers to the way his poetry is obsessively involved with states of mind, emotions and feelings, usually dealing with so-called "interpersonal relations." Yet, in marked contrast to the Confessional poets such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, Creeley's voice is tentative and exploratory. Few contemporary poets have thought and written more about the process of writing than Creeley. This process is always (one wants to say, eventually) cognitive. Creeley's "unsure" situation derives from his wanting to take hold of knowledge and felt presence, but paradoxically realizing that they are never solid or enduring goals. Perhaps the best gloss on Creeley's project is the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others, who set out in the 1940s and 50s to explore how consciousness structures itself in states, patterns and movements that are at once physical and emotional.

Because Creeley sometimes writes in an abstract way, due to his lack of proper nouns or descriptive settings, many readers miss the emotional springs of his work. His subject matter, however, often echoes that of the poets who wrote in a classical lyric tradition – Wordsworth, Browning, Hardy, and Dickinson. His subjects are domestic, often concerned with relations between lovers, or moments when memory floods the mind, or attempts to record or "correct" the development and process of an emotional state. The poet Robert Hass has referred to Creeley as having produced

“the one genuinely original verbal music in the English language in the second half of the twentieth century” (Hass, 1984). This estimation is based on how Creeley discovered in the use of the line break a new sense of metrics, but also how his attention to shifters and pronouns and connectives in a sentence are the clues to how we maneuver and situate ourselves in the world, literally and phenomenologically. Here is a brief example:

Locate *I*
love you some-
where in

teeth and
eyes, bite
it but

take care not
to hurt, you
want so

much so
little. Words
say everything.

This is the first half of a poem called “The Language,” which ends: “Speech / is a mouth.” The complex of relations here, between speech and erotic desire, orality and sexuality, aggression and tenderness, is rendered in halting and simple language. But each line, in its unity and connection to the ones before and after it, reads as a sort of figure that captures one aspect of the complexity in such a way that it can be read as a part of that complex, or its structural center. And the way the poem mediates between an intensely personal experience and a template of a more universally shared situation has analogues with the classic American struggle between individualism and a commonality of experience.

The poetic theory developed by the Black Mountain poets affected many other writers, as diverse as Robert Kelly, Larry Eigner, Diane Wakoski, Hayden Carruth, Denise Levertov, James Laughlin, Cid Corman, Paul Blackburn and John Weiners, as well as a succeeding generation that included Nathaniel Mackey, Michael Harper, Clayton Eshelman, and Thomas McGrath. Taken together with the Beats from two generations, the Black Mountain school could be considered the major American poetic avant-garde for the three decades after World War II. Their influence began to wane in the 1980s, however, when first the elevation of John Ashbery as the most important American poet, and then a return to formalist verse, shifted the attention of younger poets in a different direction. Poetry audiences in general have always been small to the point of invisibility, and with the advent of the internet, and the ever increasing influence of television on popular culture, reading poetry has been

described ironically by one critic as America's best hidden vice. But there is always some modicum of attention paid to the most newsworthy poets of the moment. The media publicity that the Beats rejected, and yet were taken up by, has now found other subjects.

The Objectivists, the Beats, and the Black Mountain poets developed a genuine avant-garde of letters in America, drawing on indigenous strains of the national experience. This occurred in part as a result of the cultural moment of the mid-twentieth-century, and in large part as a reaction against that moment. But moments pass. The balance between their emphasis on improvisation, and the dedication to a discipline and a search for a nourishing tradition of innovation, was hard to sustain. The cultural battles represented by the Donald Allen anthology and the many small magazines have subsided. Ferlinghetti has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the most prestigious of all literary societies. City Lights Books is a tourist attraction. Ginsberg, Kerouac, and Olson have passed away. Outside of the special Naropa School of Embodied Poetics in Colorado, the Beat mystique and its hand-grown tradition is seldom treated as the center of a curriculum. But the continuing interest of some readers in the Beat legend, even if only based at first on a curiosity about a life-style, has kept their work in print. Whether or not their indigenous radicalism will resurface in a later generation remains to be seen.

As Ginsberg said, in an early poem (Ciuraru, 2002: 72): "We are a legend, invisible but / legendary, as prophesied."

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New Aestheticisms: the Artfulness of Art

Stephen Burt

Most chapters in books like this one introduce literary works and authors via literary movements which produced them, with leaders, doctrines, and manifestos, or else via large social changes to which they relate. Some American poetry from the middle of the twentieth century needs to be studied that way (see chapters 26 and 27). Virtually all the period's poets responded, explicitly or implicitly, to its major historical events: the Depression and the New Deal, World War II, 1950's prosperity and fears of conformity, the Civil Rights movement and the far-reaching cultural changes which followed. Yet analyses based on explicit schools, or on explicit social goals, are almost uniquely ill-suited to most of these poets. Introducing a 1950 anthology, John Ciardi noted "no evident grouping into programs," "no poetry of movements and manifestoes" such as the 1910s or the late 1960s would provide (Ciardi, 1950: xxx). Grand narratives about mid-century poetry often focus either on its movement into the academy, or on supposed rebels against that movement. Such narratives often focus on one or two major figures, such as Robert Lowell in New York and New England or Jack Spicer in San Francisco; they often present particular books, such as Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956) or Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959), as turning points. Such narratives have their place, not least because many younger poets believed them. At the same time, however, those narratives exclude much; they smack of teleology, or of Whig history, and recent critics have begun to reject them.

American poetry from 1930–70 is best explained through a series of smaller stories focused on two generations of poets who largely shared certain goals. Until the 1960s, and sometimes even then, their work was almost always anti-Utopian, opposed to all-encompassing projects, aware of its own limits. These poets rejected (sometimes after accepting) grand Marxist or Catholic cultural projects, and rejected instrumental or primarily social conceptions of literature. Many poets served in World War II, which left them curious about Europe, inclined towards preservation over large-scale innovation, and suspicious of all-encompassing causes. They were the first generation of American poets to depend on universities, to which they brought, and in which

they helped establish, the so-called New Criticism, methods of close textual analysis suited to undergraduate classrooms and to High Modernist poems (especially those of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot). These poets read, and appeared in, *Kenyon Review*, *Partisan Review*, and the *New Republic* (see chapter 5), and in *Poetry* (Chicago); they pursued both the discoveries of the High Moderns and the formal repertoire of the English past, and they saw little reason to choose between the two domains. After 1960, some poets abandoned earlier styles for more direct, more spiritually ambitious, or at least less discursive, free verse. Others continued in more formal modes; much of their shared achievement nevertheless reflects the climate in which they started out.

The “Middle Generation”

Few readers think Louise Bogan (1897–1970) a major poet, but many admire her austere lyric gifts; because she stood outside her period’s self-declared movements, but came into contact with most of its major poets, Bogan’s compact, enduring oeuvre makes an appropriate point of entry. Raised in Maine, Bogan acquired a classical education in high school and at Boston University before leaving college to marry her first husband: after their separation and his death, Bogan and her daughter Maisie settled in New York City, where she joined, first, the *Others* circle around Alfred Kreymsborg and William Carlos Williams (in 1917–18), and then the longer-lasting, less experimentally inclined circle that included the poet Rolfe Humphries and the critic Edmund Wilson (a lifelong friend). Bogan’s characteristic lyric poetry applies severely worked-out sonic patterns to a speaker who treats her emotions severely as well: often she imagines lovers who have outlived or outlasted their serious hopes. The frequently-anthologized “Medusa” speaks for a man or woman turned to stone, for whom “Nothing will ever stir” (Bogan, 1977: 4). The later “Kept” compares an unspecified “we” to discarded dolls:

The playthings of the young
Get broken in the play,
Get broken, as they should.

(Bogan, 1977: 87)

Bogan’s style deepened more than it altered, and she wrote less frequently (though still with power) after *Poems and New Poems* (1941); *The Blue Estuaries* (1968), intended as her definitive collection, excludes much of her oeuvre. Bogan owes much (as her readers noticed) to Yeats, but also to a separate tradition of American lyric by women, among them Sara Teasdale and Bogan’s friend Léonie Adams; as late as 1959 Bogan argued that “poetry written by women has produced its own distinct lines of development” (Bogan, 1970: 430). From 1931 to 1969 Bogan served as poetry critic for the *New Yorker*; her many reviews for that magazine and others, collected in *A Poet’s*

Alphabet (1970), reveal a sure taste alert to the limits of its audience, whose expectations Bogan mocked in “Several Voices Out of a Cloud”: “Parochial punks, trimmers, nice people, joiners true-blue, / Get the hell out of the way of the laurel. It is deathless / And it isn’t for you” (Bogan, 1977: 93).

Some readers unfamiliar with Bogan’s own oeuvre know her as the early muse of Theodore Roethke (1908–62), who had admired her poetry before they met in 1935; after a passionate romance, their relationship cooled into mentor and disciple, and Bogan’s hard clarity informs a portion of Roethke’s lyric work from *Open House* (1941) forward. Roethke’s demanding German-American father operated a greenhouse in Saginaw, Michigan; his family, and the lush plant life around them, informed the poems that first made Roethke notable (“Cuttings,” “My Papa’s Waltz”). Those personal and botanical meditations (leavened with Whitman, and with Eliot’s *Four Quartets*) enabled the later, much longer landscape poems of *Praise to the End* (1951) and *The Far Field* (1964), which explore Roethke’s ecstatic identification with all green, growing, juvenile or sexual things:

You mean?
I can leap, true to the field,
In the lily’s sovereign right?
Be a body lighted with love,
Sad, in a singing-time?
Or happy, correct as a hat?

(Roethke, 1975: 94)

Roethke’s concentration on natural vigor, on verve in every line, also enabled delightful light verse. His compact, wrenching elegies and self-elegies, such as “Wish for a Young Wife” derive their strength from that same vigor imagined as lost. “What I love is near at hand,” Roethke wrote, “Always, in earth and air” (Roethke, 1975: 195). His emphases on spiritual striving and instinctive energies left little room for intellectual arguments, nor for complicated organization: these limits made him less central, and less influential, than his most important near contemporaries, Elizabeth Bishop, Randall Jarrell and Robert Lowell.

Jarrell (1914–65) quickly became his generation’s leading poetry critic; his own poetry took longer to develop. Raised in Tennessee and California, Jarrell attended Vanderbilt University in Nashville, where the poets and New Critics John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren (see chapter 25) encouraged his prodigious intellect. By the end of the 1930s Jarrell had established himself as a reviewer, and his dense early poems appeared frequently in journals. He entered the Army in 1943 and spent much of the war teaching bomber navigation; his empathy with soldiers, sailors and fliers informed *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945), and *Losses* (1948), whose poems use both Romantic and modernist tools to record the fears and the anonymity of military life. The much-anthologized title poem from *Losses* speaks for the American dead:

We read our mail and counted up our missions –
 In bombers named for girls, we burned
 The cities we had learned about in school –
 Till our lives wore out; our bodies lay among
 The people we had killed and never seen.
 When we lasted long enough they gave us medals;
 When we died they said, “Our casualties were low.”

(Jarrell, 1969: 145)

Jarrell’s later work reflects his interests in German literature (from Rilke’s poems to the Grimms’ tales), in psychoanalysis, and above all in children and childhood. The long poems “The Night Before the Night Before Christmas,” “The End of the Rainbow” and “Hope” focus on disappointed women and girls, and on the puzzles of family life; so do many short poems, some partly dramatic or narrative. At the end of “The Lost Children,” a mother of “two little girls” (one dead, one grown) remembers her dream about them:

It’s as if we were playing hide-and-seek.
 The dark one
 Looks at me longingly, and disappears;
 The fair one stays in sight, just out of reach
 No matter where I reach. I am tired
 As a mother who’s played all day, some rainy day.
 I don’t want to play it any more, I don’t want to,
 But the child keeps on playing, so I play.

(Jarrell, 1969: 303)

Jarrell’s prose includes *Poetry and the Age* (1953); a comic campus novel, *Pictures from an Institution* (1954); and four children’s books, most notably *The Bat-Poet* (1963). Though his prose flaunts wit, his poems focus on pathos; their “feminine” qualities, and their commitment to character and voice, inspired later poets, but vexed critics, who found their structures (often based on repeated words) hard to describe.

Jarrell’s early reviews helped make Robert Lowell (1917–77) the representative poet of his generation – a status he retained, in many quarters, from *Lord Weary’s Castle* (1946) through *Day by Day* (1977). Lowell defied his patrician Boston background by leaving Harvard for Kenyon College, where he studied with Ransom and lived with Jarrell. Informed by Tate, by Gerard Manley Hopkins, and above all by Milton, Lowell’s poetry of the 1940s reflects an apocalyptic and idiosyncratic Catholic faith as it calls its New England to harsh judgment. Its most famous poem, “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket,” concludes:

Atlantic, where your bell-trap guts its spoil
 You could cut the brackish winds with a knife
 Here in Nantucket, and cast up the time

When the Lord God formed man from the sea's slime
 And breathed into his face the breath of life,
 And blue-lung'd combers lumbered to the kill.
 The Lord survives the rainbow of His will.

(Lowell, 2003: 18)

The respect of his peers – and the awards that followed – could not save Lowell from his sometimes terrifying bipolar disorder, whose manic phases regularly landed him in hospitals. After years of false starts, Lowell reemerged with *Life Studies* (1959): though it began with accomplished poems in his old manner, much of the volume described, in prose and in daring, irregularly rhymed free verse, Lowell's tormented life and the lives of his relatives. "Commander Lowell" remembered the poet's ineffectual father, once a Navy man:

Year after year,
 he still hummed "Anchors away" in the tub –
 whenever he left a job
 he bought a smarter car.
 Father's last employer
 was Scudder, Stevens and Clark, Investment Advisers,
 himself his only client.

(Lowell, 2003: 173)

Though Lowell invoked precedents (especially W.D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle*) few poets before him had made compelling art from such rawly personal, or shameful, materials. Some readers (Tate among them) considered the book a disaster; many more thought it a revelation – or a revolution. Yet *Life Studies* – like the late poetry of Sylvia Plath, Lowell's onetime student (see chapter 32) – maintained a commitment to form alongside "confession," a consciousness that even the rawest-sounding poems required attention to individual words and lines. Lowell's work of the early 1960s includes enduring poems of political disillusion and protest, among them "For the Union Dead" and "Waking Early Sunday Morning." His late unrhymed sonnets (five books, starting with *Notebook 1967–68*) courted controversy with their bulk, their overlapping contents and their apparent disorganization; *History* collected sonnets about ideas and public events, while *For Lizzie and Harriet* and *The Dolphin* (all 1973) addressed the end of Lowell's second marriage (to the critic and novelist Elizabeth Hardwick, mother of their daughter) and the beginning of his third (to the novelist Caroline Blackwood). Helen Vendler praised Lowell's "difficult grandeur" in making his late poetry out of "nearly indigestible fragments of experience"; of the quieter *Day by Day* (1977), she concluded, "Only a poet who had so violently attempted to give the ashheap of history a succession of intelligible aesthetic shapes could now so passionately abandon himself to randomness of felt fact" (Vendler 1980 125, 126, 148).

Both Jarrell and Lowell measured their work against, and tried to learn from, their less famous, more reticent friend Elizabeth Bishop (1911–79). Raised by extended family

in Massachusetts and Nova Scotia after her mother's confinement to a mental institution, Bishop became a star of the undergraduate literary scene at Vassar, then moved to New York. There she met Marianne Moore who became a mentor and friend. *North and South* (1946) collected 11 years' worth of poems, written in New York, Paris, and Key West. Their careful description takes cues from Moore, from Hopkins and from George Herbert, finding visual symbols for fragile lives, as in "Jéronimo's House":

My house, my fairy
palace, is
of perishable
clapboards with
three rooms in all,
my gray wasps' nest
of chewed-up paper
glued with spit.

(Bishop, 1983: 34)

Jarrell introduced Lowell to Bishop in New York in 1947. Suzanne Ferguson considers their meeting an "originating moment" for the three poets' "coherent postmodern aesthetic"; David Kalstone and Thomas Travisano have shown how closely these poets remained involved in one another's works and lives (Ferguson, 2003: xvii). From 1951 to 1967 Bishop lived in Brazil with her partner Lota de Macedo Soares; their life there inspired many of the poems in *Questions of Travel* (1965). At once an oblique love poem and a response to Brazilian landscape, "Song for the Rainy Season" begins:

Hidden, oh hidden
in the high fog
the house we live in,
beneath the magnetic rock,
rain-, rainbow-ridden,
where blood-black
bromelias, lichens
owls, and the lint
of the waterfalls cling,
familiar, unbidden.

(Bishop, 1983: 101)

This hidden and hospitable house, with its "private cloud," offers the reserve, and the "self-forgetful perfectly useless concentration," Bishop admired in life and sought in her art (Bishop, 1983: 101; quoted in Ferguson, 2003: 215). Happy throughout the 1950s, the domestic ménage collapsed in the following decade; after Lota's breakdown and suicide in 1967, Bishop returned to America, teaching during the 1970s at Harvard. *Geography III* (1976) includes poems famously linked to her personal losses, among them "Crusoe in England" and "One Art" ("The art of losing isn't hard to master"), along with masterpieces of other kinds. "Poem" ("About the size of an old-style

dollar bill”) is the last and subtlest of Bishop’s several poems about amateur paintings (an art she practiced herself). The painting depicts a Nova Scotia farm, and represents

Life and the memory of it cramped,
dim, on a piece of Bristol board,
dim, but how live, how touching in detail,
– the little that we get for free,
the little of our earthly trust. Not much.

(Bishop, 1983: 177)

Early readers who lauded Bishop’s eye often missed her work’s hidden pain, or its ethical dimensions. Though she refused to allow her work into anthologies of women’s poetry, she is now routinely read as a poet of feminist viewpoints and of lesbian sexuality; Adrienne Rich found Bishop “consciously trying to explore marginality, power and powerlessness,” goals “closely – though not exclusively – linked with the essential outsiderhood of a lesbian identity” (Rich, 1986: 135, 127). Other recent critics (especially Bonnie Costello) have tried to direct attention back toward her aesthetic goals.

Frequently grouped with these three poets for reasons both aesthetic and biographical are John Berryman (1914–72) and Delmore Schwartz (1913–66). Schwartz shared the *Partisan* circle’s dual devotion to Marxist thought and to T.S. Eliot, and also its New York Jewish roots, the subject of his vivid short fiction (see chapter 30). Schwartz’s debut collection of poems and stories, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (1938), made him briefly the most-watched poet of his time. The verse of *In Dreams* favored elaborate argument, and can strike later tastes as awkwardly discursive: its best moments record with wit and charm the self-conscious intellectualism and awkwardness which gave Schwartz his subjects. One poem describes the body as “the heavy bear who goes with me”; another, “The Ballet of the Fifth Year,” remembers

my fabulous intent
When I skated, afraid of policemen, five years old,
In the winter sunset, sorrowful and cold,
Hardly attained to thought, but old enough to know
Such grace, so self-contained, was the best escape to know.

(Schwartz, 1959: 74, 59)

Graced in the 1940s with academic jobs at Harvard (where he lived with Lowell) and Princeton (where he grew close to Berryman), Schwartz declined during the 1950s into an erratic life marked by mental illness, exacerbated by prescription drugs and alcohol; during his late stint at Syracuse University one of his students was the rock musician Lou Reed.

Schwartz’s death inspired twelve tormented elegies, “one solid block of agony,” within Berryman’s sequence *The Dream Songs* (1963, 1968), 385 18-line poems on topics sometimes achingly personal, sometimes playfully obscure (Berryman, 1969: 176). *The Dream Songs* use at once the post-Yeatsian sense of stanza and line evident in Berryman’s earlier work; his zestful, sometimes quizzical comic sense; and his own set

of shameful revelations – his father’s apparent suicide in Oklahoma, Berryman’s own complicated love life, his drinking and his suicidal impulses. Some *Dream Songs* begin in dejection or whimsy: “Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so” (Berryman, 1969: 16). Others use their consciously artificial language, their “impulse to cartoon psychic experience,” in order to plumb painful depths:

There sat down, once, a thing on Henry’s heart
 só heavy, if he had a hundred years
 & more, & weeping, sleepless, in all them time
 Henry could not make good.
 Starts again always in Henry’s ears
 the little cough somewhere, an odour, a chime.

(Vendler, 1995: 34; Berryman, 1969: 33)

Like Lowell, Berryman prepared for his apparently wild poems with earlier work of great formal control. After study at Columbia and Cambridge universities, Berryman took most of a decade to achieve the stiff, estranged rhythms of *The Dispossessed* (1948). In a succession of academic posts (including Princeton and, later, the University of Minnesota) he labored on critical and scholarly projects, including a study of Stephen Crane and a never-completed edition of *King Lear*. A 1946 love affair prompted a vivid if stilted volume of sonnets modeled directly on Elizabethan sequences (and published only in 1966). Having depicted shame, guilt and erotic feelings *in propria persona*, Berryman applied these skills to a distant milieu, producing his first widely-admired work in *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* (1955), a verse-biography of the New England Puritan poet in 57 dense, stuttering stanzas:

Chapped souls ours, by the day Spring’s strong winds swelled,
 Jack’s pulpits arched, more glad. The shawl I pinned
 flaps like a shooting soul
 might in such weather Heaven send.
 Succumbing half, in spirit, to a salmon sash
 I prod the nerveless novel succotash—
 I must be disciplined,
 in arms, against that one, and our dissidents, and myself.

(Berryman, 1989: 135)

Contemporaries read Bradstreet, and then *The Dream Songs*, with awe and puzzlement: Bishop wrote to Lowell, “One has the feeling 100 years from now [Berryman] may be all the rage – or a ‘discovery’ – hasn’t one?” (quoted in Travisano, 1999: 283).

Late Moore, Late Stevens, Late Williams, Late Auden

Bogan recalled that during the 1940s “The later work of Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams became centers of emulation” (Bogan, 1951:

101). Moore's *What Are Years?* (1941) and *Nevertheless* (1944) extended, rather than altering, the conscious artifices of her earlier poetry, though the late books also sought a wartime optimism. "The Paper Nautilus" saw in a nautilus's egg-case

its wasp-nest flaws
of white on white, and close-

laid Ionic chiton-folds
like the lines in the mane of
a Parthenon horse,
round which the arms had
wound themselves as if they knew love
is the only fortress
strong enough to trust to.

(Moore, 1981: 122)

Moore's syllabics, her ethical sense, her complexly subordinated syntax, and her attention to the natural sciences informed some exceptional later poets, among them Katherine Hoskins, May Swenson, and Amy Clampitt.

After *Harmonium* (1923) (see chapter 23), Stevens wrote almost no verse for seven years, occupied with his responsibilities as a father and an insurance-company lawyer. Stevens' return to poetry in *Ideas of Order* (1936) and subsequent volumes set his continuing interest in Romantic attitudes and philosophical problems beside a new attention to the Depression and, later, the war. Correcting earlier views of him as disengaged, Stevens' recent exegetes focus on the self-criticism and the social concerns in poems such as "Dry Loaf" (1942):

It is equal to living in a tragic land
To live in a tragic time.
Regard now the sloping mountainous rocks
And the river that batters its way over stones,
Regard the hovels of those who live in this land.

(Stevens, 1997: 183)

Widespread acknowledgment of Stevens' powers came with the more confident, and more abstract, poems of *Transport to Summer* (1947) and *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950), and with the poems of old age and retrospect in his 1954 *Collected*. These volumes also offered Stevens' best long poems, among them the title poems from *Transport* and *Auroras*; "Esthetique du Mal," which Lowell singled out for praise; and "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction." Stevens scrutinized the nature and the consolatory necessity of imagination, setting it against the unignorable claims of a literal, social realm. "Esthetique du Mal" declared: "The greatest poverty is not to live / In a physical world, to feel that one's desire / Is too difficult to tell from despair" (Stevens 1997: 286). Other poems exalted the metaphysical: "Description without Place" described its own verbal felicity as

an artificial thing that exists
In its own seeming, plainly visible,

Yet not too closely the double of our lives,
Intenser than any actual life could be.

(Stevens, 1997: 301).

“The poem must resist the intelligence / Almost successfully,” Stevens decided (Stevens, 1997 307). His late work’s “never-ending meditation” at times “Displays the theory of poetry / As the life of poetry,” and seeks “the theory of life, / As it is, in the intricate evasions of as” (Stevens, 1997: 397, 415). Attractive in their own right to many readers, such abstract flights have obscured for others the “plain sense of things” and the simpler kinds of human feeling – loneliness, regret, failure and yearning – on which his verse depends, and which it describes (Stevens, 1997: 428).

Previously confined to small presses, Williams’ work became widely available only with his New Directions *Collected Poems* (1938). *The Wedge* (1944), *The Clouds* (1948) and the first installments of his long poem *Paterson* (1946–58) epitomized his later importance. Williams’ professedly American metrics, derived from American speech and concrete sensations, described their own “bridge- / ward going / into new territory” (Williams, 1988 137). A poem called “The Poem” recommended: “be a song – made of / particulars, wasps, / a gentian – something / immediate, open” (Williams, 1988: 74).

Presenting themselves as technical achievements – “machine[s] made of words,” in Williams’ own phrase (Williams, 1988: 54) – the poems also set their attention to American society against the supposed irrelevance of European forms. In Book Three of Williams’ long poem *Paterson* (1946–58), the town library goes up in flames:

The pitiful dead
cry back to us from the fire, cold in
the fire, crying out – wanting to be chaffed
and cherished

those who have written books

(Williams, 1992: 123)

But the poem moves on, into the streets and public parks, and into the falls at the core of the town, where the poet (or the spirit of *Paterson*, New Jersey, itself) declares:

The past above, the future below
and the present pouring down: the roar,
the roar of the present, a speech –
is, of necessity, my sole concern

(Williams, 1992: 144–5)

Jarrell in 1948 described Williams's "knowledge of people," his "muscular and emotional identification with [his poetry's] subjects," and his "real and unusual dislike of, distrust in, Authority" (Jarrell, 2001: 241, 240, 242). His acoustically masterful free verse, and his concentration on American language and places, made the poems attractive counterweights to the more obviously intellectual or elite influences Williams deplored; both Jarrell and Lowell credited Williams's example for changes in their own styles. Among the many later poets stylistically indebted to Williams, perhaps the most original was A.R. Ammons (1926–2001), whose disarmingly garrulous, partly improvised long poems, starting with *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (1965) try to "let a new / order occur / from the random & / nondescript" (Ammons, 1993: 17).

On the other end of the scale belongs the influence of W.H. Auden (1907–73), by consensus the major English poet of his era. Auden moved to America in 1939, settling in New York City, where he continued to winter until 1970. Imitators of his 1930s style included the young Jarrell and the soldier-poet Karl Shapiro (1913–2000), both of whom soon moved on. Auden's more lasting effects on American poetry came in the playfully mandarin styles of his late poetry (peaking in 1955's *The Shield of Achilles*), in his personal charisma, and in his critical powers. Auden judged the Yale Younger Poets series of first books from 1946 to 1959; most of the poets he chose in the 1950s wrote (at the time) in inherited rhyming forms, and most enjoyed long, celebrated careers, among them Adrienne Rich (1951), at the time a Radcliffe undergraduate; W.S. Merwin (1952); John Ashbery (1956); James Wright (1957); and John Hollander (1958). One of the later Auden's signature poems, "'The Truest Poetry Is the Most Feigning'" (the title quotes *As You Like It*), describes "Man" as "the only creature ever made who fakes"; it ends by asking,

What but tall tales, the luck of verbal playing,
Can trick his lying nature into saying
That love, or truth in any serious sense,
Like orthodoxy, is a reticence?

(Auden, 1991: 621)

The question suggests the lines in which Auden's influence operated, sending young poets toward elaborate, consciously artificial forms, urbane tones, modest claims for their own art, and – sometimes – gay male camp. These directions inform some of Hollander's late work and that of other East Coast "academic" poets, especially Anthony Hecht, Richard Howard, and James Merrill.

From the 1950s through the 1960s

Many postwar poets emerged from America's elite universities; some, as veterans, attended them on the G.I. Bill. The years between 1946 and 1954 saw Ginsberg,

Hollander, Howard and Kenneth Koch at Columbia University in New York, and Ashbery, Robert Bly, Robert Creeley, Donald Hall, Koch, Frank O'Hara and Richard Wilbur at Harvard, along with Rich at Radcliffe. Bogan found in the young poets of 1950 a "tendency towards expertness and control – accompanied by what seems to be a complete exhaustion of experimentalism" (Bogan, 1951: 103). No poet represented that tendency better than Richard Wilbur, who began writing verse seriously while a staff sergeant in Europe during the war. From his 1947 debut *The Beautiful Changes* on, Wilbur's graceful, understated poems described a world where respect for beauty, reason and modesty belie – and might even ameliorate – a human history of risk and blood. One much-anthologized early poem, "First Snow in Alsace," sets its landscape's innocence against its veteran's guilt:

Absolute snow lies rumpled on
 What shellbursts scattered and deranged
 Entangled railings, crevassed lawn,

As if it did not know they'd changed.

(Wilbur, 1989: 347)

"The use of strict poetic forms," Wilbur wrote, "traditional or invented, is like the use of framing and composition in painting; both serve to limit the work of art, and to declare its artificiality: they say, 'This is not the world, but a pattern imposed upon the world or found in it'" (Ciardi, 1950: 7). Wilbur's limited orders also correspond (as his poems sometimes point out) to a secular liberal politics, in which citizens recognize that no one way of life is natural and inevitable; "no one style, I think, is recommended" (Wilbur, 1989: 134). "Wilbur feels that only an extravagantly artificial art may, by respecting the alterity of the genuine, approach it" (Longenbach, 1997: 76).

Another critic sees in Wilbur's success a pragmatic reaction to poetry's new place in the academy, and a response to the new threat of mass culture: Wilbur's "sense of audience encompasses those still new to poetry," "mocking himself and his longing for an unreal perfection" (Brunner, 2001: 38). His poems about art and artists exemplify that pragmatic approach; in "Juggler"

a heaven is easier made of nothing at all
 Than the earth regained, and still and sole within
 The spin of worlds, with a gesture sure and noble
 He reels that heaven in,
 Landing it ball by ball
 And trading it all for a broom, a plate, a table.

(Hall et al., 1958: 326)

Jarrell praised Wilbur's own "compulsion" to "show / the bright underside of every dark thing," but complained about his imitators, writing to Bishop in 1956, "who'd have thought that the era of the poet in the Gray Flannel Suit was coming?" (Jarrell,

2002: 413; Jarrell, 1999: 252). Wilbur's work became a sort of synecdoche for the many graceful poems in traditional forms which dominated trade presses (and prizes) throughout the 1950s, when "collections seemed incomplete without" a sestina (Brunner, 2001: 161). These 1950s aims received a summing-up in Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson's 1958 anthology *New Poets of England and America*. Hall spent 1951–3 at Oxford, where he encountered the English poets of the acerbic, formally conservative Movement; his anthology recorded the last moment in the history of Anglophone poetry when English and American developments ran in the same direction. (This overlap helped the Movement poet Thom Gunn, a Cambridge graduate who moved to California in 1954, become – as he called himself for decades – "Anglo-American.")

Hall, Pack, and Simpson described themselves as chastened, careful, happy to learn from the past. "Experience is, after all, / The heart of the matter," Howard Moss decided: "Caution has its place" (Hall et al., 1958: 239). In Rich's "Versailles," "the cry of closing rings / For us and for the couples in the wood / And all good children who are all too good" (Hall et al., 1958: 267). Many poems compared, explicitly or implicitly, postwar disorder with the consciously artificial, limited order of gardens or works of art. A tongue-in-cheek stanza of Hollander's exemplifies such scenes and concerns:

Inside the long windows Leopoldine is playing
Her Gradus ad Parnassum, while nearby
A Chinese philosopher on a silk screen shrinks
From the thunder he has always held to be
The ultimate disorder, as the wind
Wrinkles a painted heron on the bank
Barely suggested behind him.

(Hall et al., 1958: 127)

Auden wrote in 1956 of "the undeniable appearance in the States during the last 15 years or so of a certain literary conformity," tied perhaps to "the role of the American college as a patron of poets" (Auden, 1956: 19). Donald Allen's 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry* introduced rawer, experimental poets who quickly appeared more relevant to the 1960s than their buttoned-up counterparts, and who courted the image of young rebels (see chapter 27). The so-called "War of the Anthologies" see Allen's selection against Hall, Pack and Simpson's, usually to the detriment of the latter.

The most sophisticated of Allen's New American groupings, the so-called New York School, included Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler, Kenneth Koch and Barbara Guest, who derived their playful, open-ended verse styles from French and Russian modern poetry, and from their close acquaintance with New York painters. "The best American writing is French rather than English oriented," Schuyler wrote, adding that "In New York the art world is a painters' world; writers and musicians are in the boat but they don't steer" (Allen, 1999: 418). O'Hara (1926–66) formed the group's social center: the range, bulk and power of his voluble, extroverted poetry became widely apparent only with his 1971 *Collected Poems* (which Allen edited).

New York School writers distinguished themselves from other New Americans by their familiarity with high culture, their greater playfulness, and their lack of connection to youth movements; they distinguished themselves from “academic” poets (like Wilbur or Lowell) as often as possible. Koch’s “Fresh Air complained that “young poets in America” were “trembling in publishing houses and universities,” “gargling out innocuous (to whom?) poems about maple trees and their children – Oh what worms they are! they wish to perfect their form” (Allen, 1999: 231).

Many of those trembling poets got the message. The 1960s saw some undergo radical changes, “dismantling their achieved styles”; the new approaches these poets adopted “share a conception of poetry as engaged in the liberation of human consciousness from a false consciousness imposed by society” (Breslin, 1987: xiii; Breslin, 1983: 59). Bly’s journal *The Fifties* (later *The Sixties*) encouraged attention to modern poems from Continental Europe and Latin America; he helped create, and named, the “Deep Image” style, which favored brief lyrics, rural settings, totemic symbols, and anti-war implications. James Wright (1927–80) – who grew up in industrial Ohio, but settled, like Bly, in Minnesota – won the Yale prize with poems much like Robert Frost’s; he adopted Deep Image techniques for the bitter frustrations and the rural ecstasies of *The Branch Will Not Break* (1963). In “Stages on a Journey Westward” the poet creates an American apocalypse, dreaming first of his rough childhood in blue-collar Ohio, then of “old Indians, who wanted to kill me,” of “the half-educated sheriff of Mukilteo Washington,” “defeated for re-election,” and finally of his own grave:

I lie down between tombstones.
At the bottom of the cliff
America is over and done with.
America,
Plunged into the dark furrows
Of the sea again.

(Wright, 1990 125)

Both Wright’s Frostian 1950s’ verse, and his Deep Image poems, set “deprivation of the spirit” in working-class cities and towns against “a pastoral inner space within the self” (Breslin, 1987: 171). Some of Wright’s last lines became much quoted: “I have wasted my life”; “If I stepped out of my body I would break / Into blossom” (Wright, 1990: 122, 143).

Like Wright, W.S. Merwin abandoned his early metrical forms for an impressionistic, post-Surrealist free verse, some of it supporting the environmental movement or opposing the Vietnam War: these poems retain the laconic, even puzzling, feel of his earlier work, in which “Remoteness is its own secret” (Merwin, 1988: 33). Punctuationless, and with plenty of white space, the later poems give the impression not so much of a poet speaking as of someone listening: in “Is That What You Are” (from 1967s’ *The Lice*),

The wheels go on praying

We are not hearing something different
 We beat our wings
 Why are you there

I did not think I had anything else to give

(Merwin, 1988: 116)

Like Wright's, such poetry sought "to uncover a kind of secular absolute," abandoning "ordinary language" in order to "lead beyond itself into the mysteries of silence" (Altieri, 1979: 195, 206). These projects recall those of "immanentist" or neo-Romantic philosophers (such as Martin Heidegger): they also extend, and remove from their discursive armature, similar yearnings in late Stevens (Altieri, 1979: 21).

Afro-American poets in these years faced obstacles (see chapter 24); between 1930 and 1960 relatively few black poets published first books. Margaret Walker's *For My People*, however, won the Yale prize in 1942, and Melvin Tolson's (1898–66) *Rendezvous with America* appeared from a trade press in 1944. Conventional in form, the volume's "engaged political poetry" shows little hint of the late-modernist experiments to come: Tolson's book-length sequences *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* (1953) and *Harlem Gallery* (1965) are elaborately allusive monuments to black Atlantic tradition and speech, presenting Tolson as a "modernist griot" with "planetary wisdom" (Thomas, 2000: 103, 116–17). Tate wrote a glowing foreword to *Libretto*, recognizing its debts to Hart Crane. One new African-American poet achieved wide recognition: Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000) chronicled working-class black Chicagoans in *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945) and *Annie Allen* (1950). The latter volume made her the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize. Brooks' early poems torque sonnets, ballads and other metrical forms to fit urban African-American speech and experience: in sonnets such as "kitchenette building," the strain of syncopated rhythms against sometimes-mandarin diction matches the strain of frustrated or un-lived lives. Brooks compared her own careful persona to the happier extroverts she observed, who defied, rather than finessing, social strictures: the title character in "the rites for cousin vit," for example, rises up irrepressibly from her own coffin, "Back to the bars she knew and the repose / In love-rooms and the things in people's eyes" (Brooks, 1971: 109). Brooks' late-1960s' poetry ventures more anger along with its skittery rhymes. "To a Winter Squirrel" becomes at once a nature lyric and a sarcastic protest against tenement housing: Brooks tells her squirrel, "This is the way God made you. / And what is wrong with it? Why, nothing. / Except that you are cold and cannot cook" (Brooks, 1971: 407). Brooks eventually changed her style more drastically, adopting a demotic free verse focused (she said) exclusively on black audiences (see chapter 33).

Of all the poets in this generation, Adrienne Rich acquired acclaim earliest in her own life, and later saw the greatest change. Rich wrote little poetry in the mid-1950s, busy raising three young sons; *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963) began a series of

experiments with jagged free verse, political argument, and autobiographical fragments, leading her in time to the outspoken and influential lesbian feminism of *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) (see chapter 32). Her poems of the 1960s explored feminism, introspection, American history, and antiwar politics in more challenging, less explicit forms, finding in landscapes, dream-visions or other women's biographies figures for her own entrapment or escape. "The Parting: I" contemplates "Barbed wire, dead at your feet, / ... Every knot is a knife / where two strands tangle to rust" (Rich, 1984: 66–7). "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" presents a dense, bitter answer to John Donne's poem of that name:

When I talk of taking a trip I mean forever.
I could say: those mountains have a meaning
but further than that I could not say.
To do something very common, in my own way.

(Rich, 1984: 137)

Donne's famous poem about true lovers parting – and the interpretive moves which that poem rewards – cannot do justice to Rich's desire to break with old (male) ways of reading and loving. Yet Rich's poem is, like Donne's, "metaphysical," yoking disparate elements together, relying on readers to piece together its metaphors, and claiming its interpretive difficulty (plausibly) as evidence of emotional depth. As such it derives its powers not only from Donne, but from the "New Critical" modes of reading Rich encountered earlier in her career.

Other postwar poets saw no need to attack those modes, nor to abandon the Anglo-American formal inheritance. Wilbur was one such poet; another was Hollander, also an eminent scholar and critic (since 1977 at Yale). Robert von Hallberg has praised these poets' "tone of the center," able "to register fine distinctions where other poets and people see none" (Von Hallberg, 1985: 30, 228). Though they also explore erotic, and Jewish, themes, Hollander's most ambitious poems are above all metapoems, concerned (like Stevens) explicitly with the poems' own rhetorical structure and with that of language, or art, generally. Many of these poems form book-length sequences organized around a structural conceit – concrete poetry in *Types of Shape* (1969), spies' coded messages in *Reflections on Espionage* (1976), or 13-by-13 syllabic grids in *Powers of Thirteen* (1983):

To say that the show of truth goes on in our outdoor
Theatre-in-the-round may be no more than to remark
That one is always led out of some cave or other
Into the irritating glare of what is never
More than a high, wide, sunny open local chamber
Of our general system of caves.

(Hollander, 1995: 26)

James Merrill (1926–95) presented the most elaborate surfaces of all; in his 1950s poems, manner almost crowds out matter, and the standout poems present themselves

as art about art about art. Starting with *Water Street* (1962), however, the poet (who had written his undergraduate thesis on Proust) began to use his Audenesque formal gifts, and his comic tones, to examine not only works of art but also events and characters in his life, including his father Charles (who founded the brokerage Merrill, Lynch), his Greek lover Strato, and his long-term partner David Jackson. “The Broken Home” compared the poet to his father, who maintained several houses, children, and ex-wives; the childless James, by contrast, does not even

try to keep a garden, only
An avocado in a glass of water –
Roots pallid, gemmed with air. And later,
When the small gilt leaves have grown
Fleshy and green, I let them die, yes, yes,
And start another. I am earth’s no less.

(Merrill, 2001: 199)

“Matinées” (a sonnet sequence, as is “The Broken Home”) became one of Merrill’s many self-mocking poems about the nature and purpose of aesthetic endeavor. The poem remembers his youthful devotion to opera:

What havoc certain Saturday afternoons
Wrought upon a bright young person’s morals
I must leave to the public to condemn.

The point thereafter was to arrange for one’s
Own chills and fever, passions and betrayals,
Chiefly in order to make song of them.

(Merrill, 2001: 269)

Merrill’s subsequent works include the three-part epic *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1982) and the posthumous *A Scattering of Salts* (1995), which accompanied its autobiographical elements with Merrill’s long-maintained, now unmistakable, interest in environmentalism (see chapter 35). Merrill’s poems treasure the comedy, and the poise, available amid the frustration and pain of his (or any) life: they represent the achievement and the vindication of the priority given to form and finish during the years in which Merrill began.

Extrapolating from the “War of the Anthologies,” many critics and poets have seen an upheaval or (appropriating Lowell’s own term) a “breakthrough” in the early 1960s. While such views have themselves become part of the literary history they claim to describe, they “cannot account for Elizabeth Bishop’s career,” nor for other accomplished poets of the generation after hers (Longenbach, 1997: vii). Among the poets who got their start in the formal intensities of the postwar climate, who looked to Auden or Stevens as early masters, one stands out as a continuing influence. John Ashbery’s early work met with incomprehension even from admirers; Auden’s foreword

to Ashbery's *Some Trees* (1956) compared the poems to "dreams and daydreams" and to a "private mythology" (Ashbery, 1956: 13–14). The volume included recognizable 1950s forms (such as a sestina called "The Painter") but also poems which seemed to describe their own difficulty: "Dear, be the tree your sleep awaits; / Worms be your words, you not safe from ours" (Ashbery, 1985: 14). Written in France, *The Tennis Court Oath* (1962) seemed even more forbidding, incorporating ludic processes, quick cuts, and persistent non sequiturs alongside passages of reverie: "Our faces have filled with smoke. We escape/ Down the cloud ladder, but the problem has not been solved" (Ashbery, 1985: 38). Subsequent volumes made clear the Romantic roots, and the emotional interest, in his strongest poems, however slippery their surfaces. After *The Double Dream of Spring* (1970) critics who agreed on little else praised him; *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975) won all three of that year's most prestigious awards. Some readers admire the challenges in Ashbery's "manipulation of pronouns," "his dismantling of the speaker-situation model" and his echoes of Modernist experiments; others exalt the "momentary sense of a lyric subject" created, through or despite those experiments, in passages like the conclusion to "Soonest Mended":

None of us ever graduates from college,
 For time is an emulsion, and probably thinking not to grow up
 Is the brightest kind of maturity for us, right now at any rate.
 And you see, both of us were right, though nothing
 Has somehow come to nothing; the avatars
 Of our conforming to the rules and living
 Around the home have made – well, in a sense, "good citizens" of us,
 Brushing the teeth and all that, and learning to accept
 The charity of the hard moments as they are doled out,
 For this is action, this not being sure, this careless
 Preparing, sowing the seeds crooked in the furrow,
 Making ready to forget, and always coming back
 To the mooring of starting out, that day so long ago.

(Shetley, 1993: 111, 129; Ashbery, 1985: 88–9)

Ashbery's "slippages and self-evasions" make him for more than one critic "the major poet of our minor age" (Altieri, 1984: 19). His poetry has understandably "been conscripted in support of a variety of oppositional postmodernisms" (see chapter 37); rather than choosing up sides, however, he draws on "an extraordinarily wide range of precursors," from Auden, Eliot, Stevens, and Moore to Raymond Roussel, and Gertrude Stein (Longenbach, 1997: 87, 88). At once discursive and resistant to paraphrase, recognizable in its tone yet unattributable to a speaking character, his writing appears to resist all supposed mid-century desiderata (form, closure, humility, tradition). One might also say it depends on them – the poems not only know what expectations to resist, what boundaries to evade, but also anticipate readers who expect a difficult treatment of lyric subjects (pathos, nostalgia, childhood regret), and who find sympathy with them insofar as they inform a difficult art.

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Drama in American Culture

Brenda Murphy

The relationship between the theater and the larger American culture has been contentious from the beginning. Although the Southern colonies welcomed the diversion of the occasional performance – the first recorded play in English presented in the American colonies, *Ye Bear and Ye Cubb* by William Darby, was staged in Virginia in 1665 – many Northern colonists had carried the Puritan anti-theatrical prejudice with them from England. While Charleston became an early center for theatrical activity, in the rapidly developing cities of the north – Boston, Providence, Philadelphia, New York – would-be producers of plays, shows, and other entertainments faced hostility from a large proportion of the colonial population, and often from colonial legislative bodies, well into the eighteenth century. In the interest of creating a virtuous American republic, the Continental Congress called in 1774 for the states to discourage “every species of extravagance and dissipation,” including horse-racing, gaming, cock-fighting, shows, and plays. The people’s desire for performance and other entertainment was not quelled by such censorship, however, and enterprising theatrical troupes found various ways of getting around legal strictures, such as presenting plays in the guise of “moral lectures.”

Far from diverting the people from their purpose during the Revolution as the law-makers had feared, the production of plays proved to be useful in articulating the new nation’s values, in rallying the emotions of patriotism, and in ridiculing the enemy. George Washington, an enthusiastic theater-goer, was present at a performance of Addison’s pro-republican tragedy *Cato* at Valley Forge in 1778. The best-known playwright of the Revolutionary period was Mercy Otis Warren, the sister of prominent Boston patriot James Otis. Although she publicly acknowledged only *The Group*, which was produced in Boston in 1775, she wrote several other popular satires of the Tories in New England, including *The Adulateur* (written 1772)¹, and possibly *The Defeat* (1773) and *The Blockheads; or, The Affrighted Officers* (published 1776), a response to General Burgoyne’s *Blockade of Boston* (performed 1776), a farce making fun of the revolutionaries. Several playwrights participated in the mythicizing of events and

figures from the revolution, notably Hugh Henry Brackenridge, who wrote *The Battle of Bunkers-Hill* (published 1776) and *The Death of General Montgomery* (published 1777), and Robert Munford, who wrote *The Patriots* (c. 1777). Although few of the plays were performed, their popularity as texts proved both the people's appetite for the genre and the utility of drama for the revolutionary cause.

In the years following the revolution, the restrictions on performance were eased in most areas of the new country, and, along with British touring companies performing a British repertoire, a number of American playwrights used drama as a vehicle for formulating the distinguishing characteristics of the new country. One of the most accomplished was Royall Tyler, whose polished comedy of manners, *The Contrast* (1787), was the first comedy by an American to be staged professionally. By contrasting the honest, straightforward, Patriot veteran Col. Manly with the silly Anglophile Billy Dimple, who has been to Europe and adopted all the affectations of the London fop, the play constructs a virile and virtuous America against an effeminate and corrupt Europe, a strategy for American social comedy that became standard in the early nineteenth century, reaching its high point in Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* (Philadelphia 1845). Susanna Rowson's comic opera *Slaves in Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia 1794), which was suggested by a series of attacks on American merchant ships by Barbary pirates, created a sensational background for the same fundamental conflict.

In *The Contrast*, the binary opposition between manly, rural American virtue and effeminate, urban, old-world vice is somewhat complicated by the creation of Jonathan, a caricature of the plainspoken, naive, natively shrewd rural New Englander, the first of many "Yankee" characters to appear in American comedies. An extreme version of the hero Manley's virtuous lack of duplicity, Jonathan is so incapable of imagining pretense that he takes a play for reality when he stumbles into a theater in the city. The easily duped innocence of Jonathan betrays an American anxiety about its vulnerability to the more sophisticated corruption of Europe and an ambivalence about the incursion of urban society upon Thomas Jefferson's "nation of farmers." The Yankee character remained a staple of American plays throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, where they expressed the country's uneasiness toward urbanization by performing the simultaneous functions of clown – creating humor through their innocent misunderstanding of sophisticated urban society – and trickster – deflating the pretensions of would-be urban sophistication through their "Yankee shrewdness," and often besting the city folks in business deals.

Many of the serious plays of the Federal period display a fervent desire to create heroic American myths and narratives. William Dunlap's *André* (1798), which he later adapted to a patriotic spectacle in *The Glory of Columbia, Her Yeomanry* (1803), contributed powerfully to the mythicization of George Washington. Similar heroic dramatizations of American history, such as C.E. Grice's, *Battle of New Orleans* (1816) and Mordecai Noah's *The Siege of Yorktown* (1824) were popular in the early years of the nineteenth century, but the major mythicizing impetus was focused on the figure of the Indian, cast as America's own version of Rousseau's "Noble Savage." As early as

the mid-eighteenth-century, American playwrights had made use of the continent's indigenous population to embody the Romantic notions about the powers of nature to ennoble that are articulated in Washington Irving's essay on "Indian Character" in *The Sketch Book* (1819). The casting of the Indian in the role of natural hero is evident in Anne Kemble Hatton's *Tammany, the Indian Chief* (1794) and William Dunlap's adaptation of the German playwright August von Kotzebue's *Pizarro in Peru; or, The Death of Rolla* (1800). The early creation of a national myth of the Noble Savage is most evident in the treatment of the Pocahontas legend in such plays as J.N. Barker's *The Indian Princess; or La Belle Sauvage* (1808) and George Washington Parke Custis's *Pocahontas; or, The Settlers of Virginia* (Philadelphia 1830). The greatest impetus for the development of the "Indian play," however, came in 1828, when the great Romantic actor Edwin Forrest, looking for a heroic role in a play with an unmistakably American subject, sponsored a contest for the best new play about an "aboriginal." The winner was John Augustus Stone's *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags* (1829), an enormous success featuring a role that Forrest was to play for nearly 40 years. Naturally proud, dignified, courteous, brave, and devoted to his family, *Metamora* embodies the traits of the Noble Savage, traits that the play allowed the Americans in the audience to appropriate as the "inheritors" of the land that shaped the hero. The enormous popularity of *Metamora* immediately inspired a spate of imitations, like Richard Emmons's *Tecumseh* (1836) and Alexander Macomb's *Pontiac* (1836), which managed to portray the praiseworthy nobility of the Indian hero while they justified his inevitable destruction by the avatars of a "superior" civilization by reminding the audience of the Indian's putative dark side, the fierce and uncontrollable "savagery" that could spell the end of the new civilization if it were not defeated.

The representation of Indians retained its heroic cast for a generation, until the reality of the escalating violence between settlers moving further and further into the continent's interior and the Indians who lived there made the myth untenable. Playwrights began to create the heroic frontiersman in opposition to the Indian, who began to take on the caricatured racist characteristics that became all too familiar in the Western play and film. What's more, the heroic myth of the Noble Savage was assailed by the potent tool of ridicule in burlesques of the earlier plays, such as John Brougham's *Metamora; or, The Last of the Pollywogs* (1847) and *Po-Ca-Hon-Tas; or, The Gentle Savage* (1855) and Charles M. Walcot's *Hiawatha; or, Ardent Spirits and Laughing Water* (1856).

The developing genre of the Western play paralleled the United States's escalating efforts to contain or eradicate the Indian population in the middle of the nineteenth century. Louisa Medina's popular adaptation of Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1839) glorified the frontiersman and signaled a new attitude toward the Indians, who are depicted as bloodthirsty savages in the play. This and subsequent plays like W.R. Derr's *Kit Carson, the Hero of the Prairie* (1850) built on the original image of Colonel Nimrod Wildfire in James Kirke Paulding's *The Lion of the West* (1831) to create an image of the frontiersman as a man of action, embodying the American virtues of independence, self-sufficiency, rebelliousness to authority, and antipathy to

civilization. In a sense, the appropriation of the myth of the Noble Savage was completed in these plays, in which the virtues that had originally been represented as naturally belonging to the Indian were attributed to the Americans and the “savagery” that had been a dark underside in the earlier plays came to constitute the whole of the Indian character. The genre of the Western play was born in this dramatic equivalent of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. It remained popular throughout the nineteenth century.

The representation of American culture in these plays was intrinsically related to the development of melodrama, the dominant dramatic genre of the nineteenth century. Recent critics and historians, such as Bruce McConachie and Jeffrey Mason, have shown that the development of melodrama in the US was a natural response to a deeply unsettled post-revolutionary political and social order. Melodrama depicts a simplified moral universe in which good and evil are clearly recognizable traits of a hero and a villain who are locked in a struggle for dominance that is often violent and sensational. In melodrama, the forces of good usually win, affirming the established social order and assuring the audience that its moral values will triumph in the end, despite the unsettled times. David Grimsted has shown that many nineteenth-century American melodramas center on an innocent and vulnerable female character who faces the threat of evil, usually sexual, from a villain and is rescued, and often married, by a hero. This melodramatic paradigm is often used to address particular social and moral concerns, which in the US were often related to class, race, and ethnicity. The single most popular theatrical phenomenon of the nineteenth century was the representation in many adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The most popular of these, by George L. Aiken, assuaged the country’s anxieties about slavery, abolition, racism, and Christian values by containing them within the familiar melodramatic paradigm. He splits the representation of race slavery among several characters: Uncle Tom, who embodies the loyalty, Christian virtue, and vulnerability that represents the slaves as weak victims deserving of the audience’s sympathy and help; George and Eliza Harris, who embody the standard middle-class values of hard work, devotion to family, ambition, and the desire for independence that would cause the audience to identify with the slaves, and thus the cause of Abolition; and Topsy, a representation of the “primitive” nature of the African slave, who only needs the firm but kind hand of Aunt Ophelia, or White civilization generally, to tame and domesticate her. Many different versions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* played variations on these iconographic characters, but the scenes that etched themselves on the country’s collective memory were Eliza, pursued by bloodhounds, making her way across an ice floe as she flees toward the north with her child in her arms, and the death of Little Eva, mourned by Uncle Tom, who kneels and prays as the soul of his little white mistress is assumed into heaven, both of which were produced with ever more sensational and elaborate stage effects as the century progressed. The slaves thus depicted were rendered both weak and virtuous, the embodiment of motherhood and Christianity, signaling to the audience that the slaves were both deserving of help to obtain their freedom and no threat to the established order once they were freed.

As the focus of the nation's greatest cultural anxiety in the mid-nineteenth century, slavery was the subject of a number of melodramas besides *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, notably *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom* (1857) by William Wells Brown, an Abolitionist lecturer who had himself been born into slavery, and Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana* (1859). Melodrama was used to assuage a number of other anxieties in the nineteenth century as well, such as the disturbing issues arising from ever-increasing immigration, urban poverty, and alcoholism. Many melodramas grew out of the Temperance movement, which was well-suited to the histrionic excess, the sensationalism, and the sentimentality of the genre. The best known is W.H. Smith's *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved* (Boston 1844), which presents traditional religious and domestic values as the nation's best hope against the temptation of demon rum. Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* after it, *The Drunkard* was used by theatrical impresarios like P.T. Barnum to try to draw a respectable middle-class audience into the theater. Along with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and William Pratt's adaptation of T.S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Barroom and What I Saw There* (1854), *The Drunkard* had a great effect on the nature of the American theater and the composition of its audience.

The depiction of what came to be known as "urban low-life" began with Benjamin A. Baker's *A Glance at New York* (1848), and a series of sequels featuring Mose the Bowery B'hoy, an urban thug with a heart of gold, whose good-natured image helped to assuage the very real threat to social stability that was posed by New York street gangs. A more serious treatment of urban poverty appeared in Dion Boucicault's adaptation of the French melodrama *Les Pauvres de Paris* into *The Poor of New York* (1857) and Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867), which owes a good deal to Charles Dickens's depictions of London. A number of nineteenth-century melodramas represented young girls whose virtue faced the double threat of poverty and male sexual dominance. In these plays, virtue often triumphs through the agency of an honest hero. These plays functioned simultaneously as wish-fulfillment, of the sort that Stephen Crane imputes to Maggie Johnson in his novella, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893), for the audience that paid its dime or quarter down on the Bowery, and as reassurance to the middle class that the poor were not a threat to their way of life, and simply needed a lucky break in order to share their orderly domestic life.

While the melodrama assuaged the cultural anxieties surrounding phenomena such as slavery, the Civil War, poverty, alcoholism, massive immigration, and ethnic conflict through sentiment, a number of theatrical forms assaulted them through humor. Minstrelsy, an imitation of African-American song and dance that was done almost exclusively by White men in blackface, began in 1829 with T.D. "Daddy" Rice's "Jump Jim Crow" song and dance. Rice performed a full evening of songs in blackface at the Bowery Theater in 1832, and the first full minstrel show debuted in New York in 1843. The minstrel show appropriated some aspects of African-American culture while presenting the black man as an essentially ridiculous figure, creating some enduring racist stereotypes that lasted well into the twentieth century. The minstrel show was used effectively as a disturbing cultural metaphor at the end of the twentieth

century by black writers such as Ntozake Shange in *spell #7* (1979), George C. Wolfe in *The Colored Museum* (1986), and Spike Lee in his film, *Bamboozled* (2001).

Ethnic humor of all kinds was a staple of vaudeville, the creature of B.F. Keith and Edward F. Albee, who began in the mid-1880s to create an empire of variety shows that became the major source of popular entertainment between 1890 and 1940 and extended at its height to more than 700 theaters and 20,000 acts, including singers, animal acts, acrobats, dancers, comedians, and other entertainment as well as short plays. Having honed his comic writing skills in more than 80 vaudeville sketches, Edward Harrigan wrote a number of comedies in the 1870s and 1880s that were based on the relations between competing ethnic groups in New York during the enormous wave of immigration between 1848 and the turn of the century. Harrigan was praised by realist critic William Dean Howells for dramatizing “the actual life of this city,” a move toward dramatic realism at a time when the American stage was dominated by melodrama, and his often raucous physical comedy helped to diffuse the tensions surrounding ethnic differences among millions of recent immigrants jammed into America’s cities.

Howells valued Harrigan most as a transitional figure toward the introduction of serious dramatic Realism, as it was being practiced in Europe by Ibsen, Strindberg, and Shaw, into the American theater. While Harrigan portrayed New York’s immigrants with an honesty that made them recognizable to audiences, literary Realists like Howells and Hamlin Garland encouraged American playwrights to attempt a serious representation of American social problems and moral issues. James A. Herne’s *Margaret Fleming* (Boston 1890) was the first American play to be written from this point of view. Although it employed many of the conventions of melodrama, it resisted the stock melodramatic closure to the play’s central domestic issue when Margaret refuses to “forgive” her husband and welcome him with open arms after he has fathered a child by one of the workers at his mill and left the mother to die without proper medical care. Instead Margaret takes the child in and tells her husband that he will have to work to earn her trust. *Margaret Fleming* was not a commercial success, but it was followed by increasingly realistic attempts to represent American society to itself on stage, and to confront an increasingly middle-class theatrical audience with social problems, issues and attitudes that required their attention. The most often-addressed social attitudes at the turn of the century were those around the relations between the sexes, specifically marriage, divorce, the double sexual standard, and the new phenomena of the emancipated New Woman and women’s rights. Significant contributions were made by Rachel Crothers, who attacked the double standard in *The Three of Us* (1906) and *A Man’s World* (1909), examined the difficulties faced by women who want to have a satisfying career and a full home life in *He and She* (1911), and addressed the problem of prostitution in *Ourselves* (1913). Edward Sheldon also addressed the double standard in *Salvation Nell* (1908), as well as political and business corruption in *The Boss* (1911) and race prejudice in *The Nigger* (1909). Other playwrights who contributed to this realistic representation of American society included Langdon Mitchell, Augustus Thomas, Bronson Howard, Clyde Fitch, and Jesse Lynch Williams,

who was awarded the first Pulitzer Prize for drama for his discussion play *Why Marry?* (1917).

Once established, Realism was to dominate the American stage for most of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, male–female relations continued to be the dominant focus of increasingly sophisticated discussion plays by playwrights such as Rachel Crothers, Philip Barry, and Sidney Howard, in which the characters were in conflict over issues, and dramatic closure occurred only with the issue's resolution. The discussion play was put to many uses beyond the domestic realm, however, ranging from academic freedom in Susan Glaspell's *Inheritors* (1921) to Prohibition in Augustus Thomas's *Still Waters* (1926), to war and pacifism in Robert Sherwood's *The Road to Rome* (1927) and *Idiot's Delight* (1936), to the United States's stance on fascism in Sherwood's *There Shall Be No Night* (1939) and S.N. Behrman's *Rain from Heaven* (1934) and *No Time for Comedy* (1939).

During this period, the writers of the New Negro movement relied primarily on a combination of melodrama and the folk play to dramatize the issues that were of vital importance to black Americans. The New Negro theater movement of the 1920s had a clear agenda that was articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois and two members of the Howard University faculty who founded the theater program there in 1921, Alain Locke and Montgomery T. Gregory. Du Bois articulated four principles for the drama of a Negro theater: the drama must be about, by, for, and near "the mass of ordinary Negro people." While Du Bois favored and occasionally wrote didactic "race plays," meant to educate African-Americans about their history and the contemporary issues facing them, Locke and Gregory dissociated themselves from didacticism and promoted folk drama. Encouraged by Locke and Gregory, playwrights such as such as Willis Richardson, Zora Neale Hurston, Mary P. Burrill, May Miller, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Eulalie Spence produced a substantial body of folk drama, although only Richardson's *The Chip Woman's Fortune* (1923) and *The Broken Banjo* (1925) were produced on Broadway. The more serious immediate agenda of this group was the eradication of lynching, the focus of a number of plays that were produced in high school auditoriums, church basements, libraries and other venues, if not in theaters. Some of the best of these are Angelina Weld Grimké's *Rachel* (1916), Mary Burrill's *Aftermath* (1919), and Georgia Douglas Johnson's *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925). These writers served as precursors and models for Langston Hughes, who had a number of folk plays produced in New York, and whose play about the disastrous domestic effects of Southern racism, *Mulatto*, played on Broadway for 373 performances in 1935.

The 1920s was by far the most productive period for theatrical activity in American history. In the 1925–6 season, the peak year of activity, there were 255 new productions in the Broadway theater, as compared with 115 in 1915–16 and 28 in 2000–1. In the prosperous Jazz Age, much of this activity was unabashed entertainment aimed at audiences with money to spend, but the general prosperity made for a wide range of theater, from the most serious literary endeavor to the wildest revue, that was unprecedented and never to be repeated. Most of this drama was not overtly political or socially minded, but as a body it makes a substantial representation of American life,

values, attitudes, and ideas in the early twentieth century. A good example of the broad representation of American culture is the work of the United States's only Nobel-Prize-winning playwright, Eugene O'Neill, whose career in the theater lasted from his debut with the Provincetown Players in 1916 until his death in 1953. O'Neill's earliest produced plays are realistic one-act sketches of the lives of sailors. While he is primarily remembered for the great autobiographical plays at the end of his career, *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) and the posthumously produced *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956), and for his daring Modernist experiments with dramatic and theatrical technique, O'Neill was vitally concerned with what he thought of as the "soul" of America. He was engaged directly with this subject in his uncompleted final play cycle, *A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed*, which chronicled the country's moral decline from 1775 to 1932, based on the story of a single American family, due to greed and materialism and the failure to value spirituality or beauty. But representations of particular aspects of American culture pervade his earlier work, such as race (*The Emperor Jones* 1920, *The Dreamy Kid* 1919, *All God's Chillun Got Wings* 1924), religion (*Days without End* 1933, *Lazarus Laughed* 1928, *Dynamo* 1929), business (*Marco Millions* 1928, *The Great God Brown* 1924), the effects of war (*Diff'rent* 1920), and all of the above (*Strange Interlude* 1928, *Mourning Becomes Electra* 1931).

The effect of the 1929 stock market crash on the theater was immediate and proved irreversible. During the 1930s, the number of new productions dropped precipitously and the capital available to producers disappeared. Audiences dwindled as unemployment rose, and thousands of actors, stagehands, and other theater professionals joined the ranks of the unemployed. During the Great Depression, new forms of theater appeared, confronting the economic, social, and political conditions of the 1930s more aggressively than Realism did. The major source for this was agit prop, the European agitation-propaganda play that was brought to the US by the labor movement and by the political Left. Agit prop employs type characters and simple situations, punctuated by songs, slogans, and direct challenges to the audience to incite involvement in the cause. It makes little use of sets or props, and can be put on in any available space, such as a union or lecture hall. It was the mainstay of leftist theater groups such as the New Playwrights Theatre, the Workers Laboratory, and the Theatre Collective, which had agitation for political and social change as their chief agenda. The techniques of agit prop were also adapted in a number of ways. Hallie Flanagan, the director of the only federally subsidized theater in US history, the WPA's Federal Theatre Project (1935–9), had experimented with Living Newspapers as the director of the theater at Vassar in the early 1930s. In the FTP, these combinations of news story and editorial, staged with agit prop techniques, were produced on such issues as the housing shortage (*One Third of a Nation* 1938), the farm crisis (*Triple-A Plowed Under* 1936), and public ownership of utilities (*Power* 1937). Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), written for a leftist theater in support of a New York taxi strike, eventually became a hit on Broadway in a production by the Group Theatre.

As is typical in unsettled times, melodrama took on a new life during the 1930s. It was used by playwrights such as Lillian Hellman, John Wexley, Clare Boothe, and

Elmer Rice to establish a simple moral framework for advocating a particular position on an issue facing the country, such as joining the European war against fascism in Rice's *Judgment Day* (1934), Boothe's *Margin for Error* (1939), and Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* (1941). Other plays aim to establish a moral framework for the times. Hellman used *The Little Foxes* (1939) to condemn both the capitalists who "eat the earth" and those who stand around and watch them do it and *The Children's Hour* (1934) to expose the evil that can come from a lie and the danger to the community of ignorance and prejudice.

In the period between 1944 and 1960, the United States enjoyed its greatest success in the context of world theater. While a straightforward Realism continued to be the mode of choice for a playwright like Lorraine Hansberry, whose *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) makes a clear statement about the economic forces and social attitudes arrayed against a black family in contemporary Chicago, the look of the American theater began to change. In collaboration with theater artists like designer Jo Mielziner and director Elia Kazan, a generation of young playwrights who emerged after World War II developed a new and distinctive theatrical idiom that became known internationally as "The American Style." Beginning with Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), and continuing with his *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Orpheus Descending* (1957), and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Ketti Frings's adaptation of Thomas Wolfe's novel, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1958), and many other plays, American playwrights created a body of work in the mode of Subjective Realism. This mode is unique in that it synthesizes two opposing aesthetics of the early twentieth-century theater: Realism, which aims to create an illusion of objective reality on the stage (the illusion that the audience is eavesdropping on real events through a transparent "fourth wall"), and Expressionism, which dramatizes the subjective reality that is perceived by one or more characters. The full development of Subjective Realism can be seen in *Death of a Salesman*, where the events in Willy Loman's mind are, as Arthur Miller said, quite as real as what is happening around him, and they are represented on stage with equal ontological status to the "real time" stage events with which they are juxtaposed.

Although he acknowledged his part in it, Arthur Miller criticized this trend in the 1950s to create what he called, in an allusion to its subjective stagecraft, "an era of gauze." Miller criticized the theater of the period for its intense inward focus on personal psychological experience and the individual's relation to the family, and for its neglect of the pressing social and political issues that were staring it in the face during the Cold War, particularly McCarthyism's threat to the performing arts through blacklisting and censorship. Miller and a number of other playwrights did engage with this reality, but it was under the cover of historical analogy, as in the treatments of McCarthyism in Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), Barrie Stavis's *Lamp at Midnight*, and Maxwell Anderson's *Joan of Lorraine* (1946), or allegory, as in Tennessee Williams's *Camino Real* (1953) and Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.* (1958).

The theater's failure to engage directly with the political realities of the 1950s was due in part to the financial conditions of the Broadway theater. In the 1950s, success

on Broadway was a necessity for the survival of an American play. The development of enormous theatrical trusts that controlled bookings throughout the country and the rise of the Broadway “road company” during the early twentieth century had spelled the end of the old regional repertory and stock companies, and theater proceeded out from New York to the rest of the country. In New York, the rising costs of production had made producers increasingly less willing to take risks in the theater, whether on subversive political statements or on experimental aesthetics. With the success of the Off-Broadway production of Jack Gelber’s *The Connection* (1959), a daringly new improvisational theatrical work about drug addicts that was staged by the Living Theatre, the state of things began to change. Off-Broadway producers were not in the theater to make a fortune; Off-Broadway theaters were exempt from many of the union regulations that made Broadway shows so expensive to produce; and Off-Broadway audiences were tolerant of minimal staging in productions that were avant-garde, experimental, and perceived as subversive. The development of the Off-Broadway theater, and the even more experimental Off-Off-Broadway cafés like La Mama and Caffé Cino, allowed the work of experimental playwrights such as Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, Maria Irene Fornés, and Megan Terry to be produced and became the center for a theatrical counter-culture that replicated itself in many smaller cities throughout the country, where playwrights as different as David Mamet, Marsha Norman, Lanford Wilson, and A.R. Gurney were nurtured.

The theatrical counter-culture took many forms. The first group with a clearly articulated agenda was the Black Arts Repertory Theater, whose guiding spirit was Amiri Baraka. Its revolutionary agenda was expressed in plays like Baraka’s *Dutchman* (1964) and *The Slave* (1964), which rejected white liberalism and promoted Black Separatism, through violence, if necessary. During the 1960s, directly confrontational political drama reappeared in the Off-Off-Broadway theater, beginning with Barbara Garson’s satire of Lyndon Johnson, *MacBird!* (1967), and Megan Terry’s *Viet Rock: A Folk War Movie* (1966), the first Vietnam anti-war play. In California, Luis Valdéz’s El Teatro Campesino, an outgrowth of the farmworkers’ movement led by César Chávez, not only produced memorable revolutionary theatre pieces and satiric plays like *Zoot Suit* (1978), which made it to Broadway, but inspired the formation of several other Latino/a theater groups. Off-off Broadway and its regional analogs also made a feminist theater possible in the 1970s. Feminist theater groups worked toward the development of a self-consciously feminist drama and theater. They emphasized collaborative creation and improvisation, resisted linear plots, and created the concept of “transformational” characters with no fixed identities to oppose the concept of essentialist identity. Such plays as Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1962), Megan Terry’s *Calm Down Mother* (1965), and Alice Childress’s *Wedding Band* (1966) established a feminist aesthetic that was taken to the mainstream in the next decade in Marsha Norman’s *Getting Out* (1977), Maria Irene Fornés’s *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977), Tina Howe’s *The Art of Dining* (1979), and Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1976), which had a successful run on Broadway.

The successful careers of two playwrights, Edward Albee and Sam Shepard, might be said to epitomize the evolving American theater of their respective generations. Albee, born in 1928, was the first playwright to become famous through success in the Off-Broadway theater. The highly praised Off-Broadway productions of his absurdist one-act plays, *The Zoo Story* (1960), *The Sand Box* (1960), and *American Dream* (1961), led to a hit Broadway production for his first full-length play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), which ran for 664 performances and was made into an Oscar-winning film, the third-highest moneymaker of 1966. Following the popular success of *Virginia Woolf*, Albee did not pursue popular success on Broadway, but continued to write difficult literary plays, many, such as *Tiny Alice* (1964), *Seascape* (1975), and *The Lady from Dubuque* (1980), obscure and bewildering to audiences. When several commercial failures made it increasingly hard for him to find Broadway producers, Albee turned to regional, foreign, and university theater for productions of plays like *The Man Who Had Three Arms* (Miami, 1982), *Finding the Sun* (Greely, CO, 1983), *Walking* (Irvine, CA, 1984), and *Marriage Play* (Vienna, 1987). The unexpected critical and commercial success of the Off-Broadway production of *Three Tall Women* in 1994 again opened the Broadway stage to Albee, and, in his 70s, he has experienced a renewed interest in his work and seen two new Broadway successes in *The Play about the Baby* (2001) and *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?* (2002).

Born in 1943, Sam Shepard began having his non-realistic, highly imagistic, language-centered one-act plays with rock music produced in the alternative venues of Off-Off Broadway in the mid-1960s. With his family trilogy, *Curse of the Starving Class* (1978), *Buried Child* (1978), and *True West* (1980), Shepard entered the mainstream of American theater, but his home base remained well off Broadway, in San Francisco's Magic Theatre and in Joseph Papp's Public Theater in New York. Through these and subsequent plays, such as *Fool for Love* (1983), *A Lie of the Mind* (1985), *Simpatico* (1994), and *The Late Henry Moss* (2001), Shepard has become recognized as one of the most significant playwrights of his generation without having a premiere on Broadway.

The last two decades of the twentieth century brought the return of a moral critique of American society and values to an American theater that now recognized and institutionalized its decentralization into Off-Broadway (now criticized by some as a low-budget reflection of Broadway), Off-Off Broadway, regional, and academic theater, any one of which could be the source of a significant play. Arthur Miller, who had not had a success in the American theater since *The Price* (1968), reemerged as the most significant social dramatist the country has produced. Successful revivals of *The Price*, *A View from the Bridge* (1955), and *Death of a Salesman* and increasing respect in Europe paved the way for the positive reception of *The Last Yankee* (1991), *Broken Glass* (1994), and *The Ride down Mount Morgan* (1998).

David Mamet came into his maturity as a dramatist with devastating representations of America's values and institutions, such as *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1988) and *Oleanna* (1991). August Wilson created a play cycle of one play for each decade of the twentieth century that dramatized the history of black Americans during this period.

While Wilson concentrated on families and the lives lived within the black community, his plays also chronicle the political, social, and economic forces that have confronted them. More directly, Anna Deavere Smith created a genre of one-woman documentary play in *Fires in the Mirror* (1991) and *Twilight Los Angeles* (1992), in which she dramatized community crises around racial and ethnic issues.

In the 1990s, identity politics took center stage in the American theater, as the politics of gender, sexual identity, and ethnicity informed the thinking of many theater artists and produced a number of memorable plays by such playwrights as David Henry Hwang (*M. Butterfly*, 1988), José Rivera (*Marisol*, 1993), and Paula Vogel (*How I Learned to Drive*, 1998). In the 1990s the epidemic of AIDS occasioned a sub-genre of plays about the disease and its effects on both its victims and society. The epitome of 1990s' theater is undoubtedly Tony Kushner's two-play cycle *Angels in America* (1993). An example of what Kushner called the "theater of the fabulous," combining realistic characters, socio-political commentary, humor, and sentiment with fantasy, myth, and epic, Kushner's play places identity politics in the context of a millennial conception of America's history and its future, a fitting theatrical representation of the United States at the end of the twentieth century.

NOTES

- 1 Plays are dated by the first New York performance unless otherwise noted.

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Part C

Contemporary Theories and
Practices

Constructions of “Ethnicity” and “Diasporas”

Aviva Taubenfeld

“What meaning . . . can continue to attach to such a term as the ‘American’ character?” questioned Henry James upon his return to the United States in 1904. It is a “challenge to speculation”; the native-born observer “doesn’t know, he can’t say, before the facts, and he doesn’t even want to know or say; the facts themselves loom . . . in too large a mass” (James, 1994: 92, 93). The question of who and what is an American, as old as the nation itself, took on urgent intensity as the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century brought to the United States a massive influx of ethnically diverse foreigners largely from Eastern and Southern Europe. Their arrival between 1880, when the wave began, and 1924, when national quotas ended it, provoked extreme anxiety among native-born Americans struggling to maintain power and a sense of nation and self. What would the next generations of Americans look like? How would they earn their living? What would become of their language, political systems, ways of life? Everything seemed up for grabs; anything seemed possible. A period of intense literary imaginings followed, as native-born Americans called upon a host of ideological and scientific discourses in an attempt to articulate and enforce their visions of the nation’s past, present, and future – visions that would now have to account for the new immigrants.

Responding to voices like those of James, David Quixano, the Russian Jewish immigrant hero of Israel Zangwill’s 1908 play *The Melting Pot*, which provided the defining trope for the new America for decades to come, proclaims: “The real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the Crucible, I tell you he will be the fusion of all races, perhaps the coming superman. Ah, what a glorious Finale for my symphony if I can only write it” (Zangwill, 1975: 37–8). The open-ended “challenge to speculation” that terrifies James provides a unique political and creative opportunity for Quixano. With the definition of the “real American” unresolved, newcomers had the potential to author the grand finale to the American symphony itself.

At the same time that they hoped to write America, many immigrant and ethnic authors sought to understand the place of other allegiances and identities within the

nation and themselves. Even Quixano, who chooses to dissolve himself completely in the American melting pot, discovers that it is far more difficult to overcome personal memory and historical allegiances in practice than in theory. "I preached of God's Crucible, this great new continent that could melt up all race-differences and vendettas, that could purge, and re-create, and God tried me with his supremest test," he despairs (p. 193). For David, whose vision for America is of racial fusion, a history of personal and national persecution proves the major impediment. In Zangwill's melodrama, however, this lingering hold on the self is ultimately overcome, and David throws himself into the melting pot looking only forward with a prayer to the "God of our children" (p. 199). Many texts, fictional and non-fictional, written by European Americans seek the same erasure and turn to the future. In Werner Sollors's terms, they turn away from identities imagined to be rooted in "descent" to identities created by an act of "consent," of choosing a new land, new marriage partner, new future (pp. 3–19). Other texts by European Americans and their descendants, however, desire just the opposite, focusing on the persistence of ancestral identities. Horace Kallen, for one, argued that "men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives, their religions, their philosophies, to a greater or lesser extent: they cannot change their grandfathers" (p. 91). For Kallen, as for Zangwill, the distinctive character of the immigrant is a biological, genetic essence, but unlike Zangwill, Kallen contends that it cannot be cast off or blended away (p. 91). Still others, however, while rejecting the notion of essentialized difference, ask with Gerre Mangione, "was it really necessary that [my Sicilian relatives] try to change themselves? Didn't America need their wisdom and their warmth, just as they and their children needed America's youth and vigor?" (p. 239). For Mangione, the abandonment of a distinguishing culture would be a grave loss to the individual, the community, the nation and its literature. Regardless of the conclusions reached, clearly many thinkers and writers – including James himself, whose "sense of the 'chill'" at even contemplating the combination of "elements in the cauldron" sent him hurrying back to England (p. 92) – felt compelled to consider what role traditions, inheritances, and locales outside the United States might play in the life of the American individual and nation.

Approaching texts written by those who emigrated from Europe at the turn of the twentieth century and their descendants as "ethnic literature" asks readers to look at manifestations of both the erasure and persistence of a sense of group distinctiveness. Critics from James Baldwin to Mary Waters remind us that unlike Americans of color, "white ethnics" have a choice in the matter, but for reasons both internal and external to the individual, the choice has not always been experienced as such. Furthermore, precisely because it is a choice, it is important to understand when individuals and groups opt in or out and how they make their selection appear either truly optional or ahistorical and naturally determined at different times. The language with which European-Americans articulate a sense of distinctiveness – be it in terms of blood, race, culture, religion, history, emotional ties to homeland, desire, or loss – reflects the complexity of their struggle to understand and forge distinguishing and

non-distinguishing American identities. Ethnic approaches to their writings require us to ask how the dominant culture, geo-politics, and scientific discourses impact these identities and how the political, economic, and social advantages conferred or denied on the basis of group distinctiveness shape its articulation and its place in the national narrative. These questions can be asked of the literature of a particular group or cross-culturally, of English language texts for general consumption or multilingual texts for insider audiences, for texts written in the United States exclusively or in transnational diaspora communities, and a shift in variables reveals different patterns and trends.

Focusing on selected English-language texts of the immigrant arrival (1880s–1924) and white ethnic revival (1965 and on) and placing them in historical, political, and scientific context, this chapter traces some of the patterns found cross culturally in the writings of “white ethnics” in United States as they struggle with the question of distinctiveness. These two periods are particularly revealing because both were times of extensive immigration, with the increased presence of newcomers amplifying discussions and anxieties over what makes an American. The central tropes of the discussion – race and ethnicity, blood and culture, nationalism and transnationalism – take on different meanings and emphases at these two moments, making the literature of these periods essential to understanding the means through which distinctiveness can be claimed and denied as well as the purpose and value of these strategies. Analyzing these changes and how they have been understood illustrates some of the hallmarks of ethnic literary approaches and their implications for the larger “American symphony.”

Making Americans: The Promise and Limits of Self-Transformation in the Progressive Era

The touchstone for many in these debates at the turn of the twentieth century was Theodore Roosevelt, whose 1894 essay “True Americanism” set the tone and expectations for native-born Americans and foreigners alike in the Progressive era. “The mighty tide of immigration to our shores has brought in its train much of good and much of evil; and whether the good or the evil shall predominate depends mainly on whether these newcomers do or do not throw themselves heartily into our national life, cease to be Europeans, and become Americans like the rest of us,” Roosevelt declared in “True Americanism” (Roosevelt, 1926: 22). Reacting to the mass immigration of Eastern and Southern Europeans, and all but denying immigration from elsewhere on the globe, Roosevelt expressed the dominant US attitude toward foreigners at this time: all Europeans, though only Europeans, are welcome, but they must be prepared in return to erase all prior national, political, and cultural identities and “learn to talk and think and be United States” (p. 24).

Of course, not all would agree. For the native-born American, the question of how to define America was central to the debate over how (and whether) to make

new Americans. Is America a “purpose and conviction” embraceable by all, as Roosevelt asserted, or is it in the blood, as he simultaneously, though perhaps unintentionally, implied when excluding “races that do not readily assimilate into our own”? (p. 23). Is it a matter of “civic nationalism,” “racial nationalism” or some combination of the two (Gerstle, 2001: 3–13)? If America is a choice, a civic identity, then what to do about the millions confronted with this choice for the first time? Progressives like Roosevelt would argue to transform them into Americans and believed this would be possible based on a neo-Lamarckian understanding of inheritance. The many sharing Roosevelt’s scientific world view at this time believed that environment shapes the individual and traits developed to adapt to an environment can be passed down physically to one’s offspring. Thus, an immigrant could be imagined to acquire “American” characteristics and transmit them bodily to future generations of Americans (Stocking, 1982: 161–94).

As Priscilla Wald has argued, immigrant narratives register the anxieties, ambiguities, and shifts in the dominant culture (Wald, 1996: 51). They draw on its discourses to negotiate the demands of Americanism. Up until World War I, when Roosevelt’s model of assimilation held sway, much of the literature reflected both the promise and burden of his notion of Americanization. With the understanding that bodies and characters could alter, that people could choose America utterly and completely, immigrant autobiographies attesting to the “making of Americans” proliferated. Jacob Riis’s 1901 autobiography *The Making of an American*, dedicated to Roosevelt, presented just such a model. “I have just told the story of the making of an American. There remains to tell how I found that he was finished at last,” he declares in the final scene of his life story (Riis, 1928: 283). Riis proceeds to tell of falling seriously ill in Denmark and lying in bed in a village just outside of Elsinore “sick and discouraged and sore – I hardly knew why myself.” This mood continues until:

all at once there sailed past, close inshore, a ship flying at the top the flag of freedom, blown out on a breeze till every star in it shone bright and clear. That moment I knew. Gone were illness, discouragement, and gloom. Forgotten weakness and suffering, the cautions of doctor and nurse. I sat up in bed and shouted, laughed and cried by turns, waving my handkerchief to the flag out there. They thought I had lost my head, but I told them no, thank God! I had found it, and my heart too, at last. I knew then that it was my flag; that my children’s home was mine, indeed; that I also had become an American in truth. And I thanked God, and, like unto the man sick of palsy, arose from my bed and went home healed.

(Riis, 1928: 283)

What was wrong with Riis that the flag could cure? In reality, he was suffering from malaria, but he omits this fact, making it appear instead that the cause of his pain was a crisis of identity, an uncertainty about the location of home that only the sight of the American flag could resolve. Replete with religious imagery, this conversion scene provides a climactic resolution to Riis’s narrative and seems to proclaim with finality that he is, as Roosevelt demanded, an American made.

Mary Antin begins her famous 1912 autobiography, *The Promised Land*, with a similar declaration:

I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over. Is it not time to write my life's story? . . . I am just as much out of the way as if I were dead, for I am absolutely other than the person whose story I have to tell. My life I have still to live; her life ended when mine began.

(Antin, 1912: 1)

A born-again American, Antin celebrates the death of the Eastern European Jewish girl she once was at the hands of her true American self.

Up until the restriction of immigration in 1924, which institutionalized a eugenic approach to making Americans, many immigrant autobiographers continued to hold onto the notion of American self-fashioning, thereby promising an anxious nation the full integration of foreigners through acts of will. As Constantine Panunzio writes in 1921:

To me therein lies the great glory of America; that she can take the rough and unfinished material from many lands and climes and so shape it, as a master shapes his clay, that they who learn of her, who drink at the fountains of her real life, who learn to love her, *actually become different beings*.

(Panunzio, 1921: 295)

While Antin and Riis assume that refashioning is an act of the individual, Panunzio assures the nation further that America itself has the power to turn its newcomers into indisputable Americans.

Yet despite personal and political motivations to do so, none of the aforementioned immigrant authors presents a clean break with the past. All express continued ties to prior identities, which they explain largely as the result of personal experience in another country and the deep emotional bond to the land this usually created. In a final love song to America at the end of his text, Panunzio declares:

I love thee America . . . In my veins runs blood, in my mind run thoughts, in my soul feelings and aspirations which Thou hast given me. Thy name is graven on my soul. I love Thee, Italy, my native land, with that mystic love with which men turn to their native country and as Pilgrims to their shrine. I love Thee, America, with manhood's strong love . . . I love Thee as I can love no other land . . . I am of Thee; Thou are mine.

(Panunzio, 1921: 328–9)

Though he insists that he loves America best, Panunzio cannot deny the draw of his native land. As diaspora scholars have realized, homeland serves as a means by which to understand and express a sense of continuity with an identity outside the boundaries and expectations of the nation. Panunzio makes his continued diasporic nationalism safer for his readers by carefully removing it from a political context and sentimentalizing

it. He even presses it into service of America (he spent World War I as an American soldier speaking on behalf of the United States to Italian troops), yet he will not deny its existence and simply “be United States.”

Antin, on the other hand, denies any connections to a homeland real or mythical.

Where had been my country until now? What flag had I loved? What heroes had I worshipped? The very names of these things had been unknown to me. Well I knew that Polotzk was not my country. It was goluth – exile . . . In very truth we were a people without a country

she writes of the Jew in the Russian Empire (Antin, 1912: 178). At the same time, however, Antin rejects Palestine, the mystic center of Jewish diasporic imagination.

Except in moments of abstraction from the world around me, I scarcely understood that Jerusalem was an actual spot on the earth . . . If Fetchke and I sang, with my father, first making sure of our audience, “Zion, Zion, Holy Zion, not forever is it lost,” we did not really picture to ourselves Judæa restored.

(Antin, 1912: 178–9)

For Antin, and the millions she claims to speak for, the Promised Land was not to be found in Europe or in Palestine but in the United States.

Yet despite her desire to erase all other affiliations and identities, even Antin finds herself haunted by her past:

I can never forget, for I bear the scars. But I want to forget – sometimes I long to forget . . . It is painful to be consciously of two worlds. The Wandering Jew in me seeks forgetfulness. I am not afraid to live on and on, if only I do not have to remember too much. A long past vividly remembered is like a heavy garment that clings to your limbs when you would run. And I have thought of a charm that should release me from the folds of my clinging past. I take the hint from the Ancient Mariner, who told his tale in order to be rid of it. I, too, will tell my tale, for once, and never hark back any more. I will write a bold “Finis” at the end, and shut the book with a bang!

Despite American expectations and her own desire to have it otherwise, she remains “consciously of two worlds,” struggling like the familiar Ancient Mariner to erase her past through the telling in order to transform into a “true American.” But though she depicts this retention as unchosen and undesired, Antin clings to it as it clings to her, by meticulously documenting and preserving it in her book.

Jacob Riis, most successfully assimilated and, as a Dane, most comfortably white, proves most forthright in his assertion and embrace of distinguishing identifications. Though the manuscript draft of his autobiography reveals that Riis deliberately expurgated from its climactic conclusion its original mention of his “roots dug deep in Danish soil,” Riis makes no attempt to mask the persistence of his Danishness in the rest of the text. Unlike Antin, who attempts to excise all nostalgic attachments to her past, or Panunzio who minimizes his feelings for homeland as childish, Riis candidly

declares his love for Denmark and his continued political allegiance to the Danish crown. "Happy he who has a flag to love. Twice blest he who has two, and such two," he declares (p. 256). He explicitly proclaims that America has not and cannot eradicate the Dane within him.

Riis explains his continued loyalty not only experientially but biologically, declaring in his book entitled *The Making of an American*:

How little we have the making of ourselves. And how much greater the need that we should make of that little the most. All my days I have been preaching against heredity as the arch-enemy of hope and effort, and here is mine holding me fast. When I see, rising out of the dark moor, the lonely cairn that sheltered the bones of my fathers before the White Christ preached peace to their land, a great yearning comes over me. There I want to lay mine. (p. 266)

Recognizing the conflict between the environmentalist basis of his reform work and Americanizing claims and his personal sense of an inalterable heredity, Riis describes his connection to his homeland as an uncontrollable, atavistic desire, which cannot be overcome. As concern over the presence of inassimilable foreigners grew, nativists seized on this idea of innate, racialized difference and attachments to define the nature of the American and the immigrant and to prove them incompatible.

"The Fusion of All Races": Racial Problems and Racial Solutions for the Making of Americans

As recent scholars of whiteness have brought to attention, with the rediscovery of Mendelian genetics at the turn of the century, proponents of racial nationalism found new support for the notion that national character and difference are located in the blood and cannot be acquired through individual adaptation. "We know that nature is more powerful than theory, and that the individual is the product of many generations, and yet we believe that the reading of the Declaration of Independence will change the essence of the child," ridiculed Alfred P. Schultz in 1908. "This is the truth: schools, political institutions, and environment are utterly incapable to produce anything. No man can ever become anything else than he is already potentially and essentially" (p. 266). With America increasingly defining itself as Anglo-Saxon and its European newcomers as racially other, inferior, and non-white, immigrants were increasingly seen as lacking the essence and potential to become American at all. Without the possibility of turning immigrants into Americans, the nation must slam shut its doors and adopt a eugenic policy to deal with the non-Anglo Saxon already in its borders, argued a growing and ultimately successful chorus of nativists. Immigrant and ethnic narratives reacted in a variety of ways, few of which denied the scientific basis of the racist argument.

In an early response to the racialization of difference, the British Jew, Israel Zangwill, discussed above, offered a biological solution to the problem of racially other immigrants. Accepting the notion of an American race, Zangwill reimagines it in a way

that grants belonging to outsiders. “America is God’s Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!” declares his hero, David.

Here you stand . . . in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won’t be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you’ve come to – these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians – into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American . . . The real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the crucible, I tell you – he will be the fusion of all races, the coming superman. (pp. 37–8)

By defining the “real American” not as Anglo-Saxon but as a race “not yet arrived,” Quixano makes space for all newcomers to join this undetermined bloodline through interbreeding. “Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian, – black and yellow” (198), are all racially distinct for Zangwill, but for precisely this reason, are all completely necessary to the American future. The dominant distinguishing characteristics of each would be preserved in the genes and fused together to produce a new hybrid super-race, superior to each of its component parts.

While Theodore Roosevelt publicly touted Zangwill’s play, others, using the same science of race and genetics as the playwright, would argue with Alfred P. Schultz that while “we are told that our truly amazing assimilative power will produce the finest human race that has ever been known . . . , [n]o dog fancier ever thought that the promiscuous crossing of bloodhound, terrier, greyhound, St. Bernard, pug, Newfoundland, and spaniel produces anything but worthless mongrel curs” (p. 324). “Promiscuous crossing never produces a homogeneous race,” they argued; “it destroys every race, even the strongest race” (p.325). And in the years leading up to immigration restriction, their claims achieved dominance.

“In Our Hearts, in Our Blood”: Embracing Race to Maintain Distinctiveness

In the years after the first World War, as the science of genetics and the language of race attained prominence in the dominant culture and the call for restriction grew louder, the beliefs that foreigners could successfully join the nation through an act of will or interbreeding diminished, and “foreign” writers shifted the emphasis of their texts accordingly. Rather than using literature to argue against the idea of inherent racial difference, as Franz Boaz was doing in anthropology, those now considered “white ethnic” writers, but then considered “less than white” (Jacobson, 1998: 4–6), often embraced the idea of racial distinctiveness and called upon it in imagining new ways of belonging in America.

These authors used the idea of race to argue not for similarity and ultimate unification, but for lasting difference and separation that would allow America to preserve its Anglo-Saxon identity, the descendants of the immigrants who arrived before the door

was closed to retain their distinctiveness, and the nation as a whole to benefit from the contributions of all. Novels about failed melting pot marriages abounded. Peder Victorious, the American-born child of Norwegian immigrants in O.E. Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth* trilogy (1927, 1929, 1931), attempts intermarriage with an Irish-American woman on the Dakota prairies, proclaiming: "We're here to build for a greater justice among men. Prejudices and superstitions will have to go. A people in bondage can neither hear nor see, and are afraid to think thoughts that can be used in the building!" (pp. 55–6). But despite his dreams, Peder finds that the differences between Norwegian and Irish, cast in both religious and racial terms, are too great, making the marriage unsustainable, and its offspring confused hybrids, rather than supermen. Bearing the message of the trilogy as a whole, in its final book, *Their Fathers' God*, a Norwegian-American minister, argues, much like Horace Kallen:

If this process of leveling down, of making everybody alike by blotting out all racial traits is allowed to continue, America is doomed to become the most impoverished land spiritually on the face of the earth; out of our highly praised melting-pot will come a dull, smug complacency barren of all creative thought and effort . . . Gone will be the distinguishing traits given us by God; dead will be the hidden life of the heart which is nourished by tradition, the idioms of language, and our attitude to life. It is out of these elements that our character grows. I ask again, what will we have left? (pp. 209–10)

Rølvaag's novel, written originally in Norwegian, insists to its readers that "If we're to accomplish anything worth while, anything at all, we must do it as Norwegians" (210). Its demand for retention suggests that social integration was in fact happening apace, and Rølvaag seeks to stem its tide by mobilizing the rhetoric of unalterable race and the contradictory demand that it not be abandoned.

Anzia Yezierska's novel *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) turns to race discourse as a way of assuaging the fears of both Jewish and non-Jewish readers that the Jew would be absorbed and vanish within America. This novel also tells the story of an intermarriage, this time between an impoverished immigrant Russian Jewess, Sonya Vronsky, and a wealthy member of the American elite, Charles Manning. Marriage is again imagined as an interracial union, believed at first to have the potential to reinvigorate an effete American aristocracy. "Are we not the mingling of the races? The oriental mystery and the Anglo-Saxon clarity that will pioneer a new race of men?" Manning declares (p. 108). But instead of combining bloodlines to create a new and superior race, this melting pot marriage fails miserably as the couple discovers that "the oriental and the Anglo Saxon" cannot find a "common language" (p. 132). In the racialized universe of the novel, Sonya cannot be remade into a "true American" like Mary Antin. "No more can I make myself over on another person's pattern. I'm different. I got to be what's inside of me. I got to think the thoughts from my own head. I got to act from the feelings in my own heart" (p. 131). Sonya must be who she essentially is, an East European Jew. And she cannot even change who her children will be through a mingling of bloodlines, for "just as fire and water cannot fuse, neither could her

Russian Jewish soul fuse with the stolid, the unimaginative, the invulnerable thickness of this New England puritan” (p. 147). The two races prove incompatible in this novel. Sonya divorces Manning and goes on to marry one of her own, and to contribute to America as a passionately artistic clothing designer. She stays a Jew and Manning an Anglo-Saxon, comfortably separate but contributing to America in their own ways.

The two autobiographical novels of Elizabeth Stern, written ten years apart, best illustrate this shift from the assimilationist to the preservationist view and the role of racial discourse in this change. Her 1917 work *My Mother and I*, published with an introduction by Theodore Roosevelt, is an Americanization narrative much like Mary Antin’s. Through public education, the unnamed immigrant child protagonist discovers “that I could make myself an American woman, no matter whether my parents or environment were American or not, that America had need of such as I, young people eager, enthusiastic, with ideals, and a deep and supreme love for her, and an understanding of the old life from which so many of America’s new citizens had come” (pp. 112–13). She sees America in civic terms and believes she can transform herself into an American through ideological commitment. Marriage to a man whom she identifies simply as “an American” (p. 153) marks the culmination of her American womanhood, and the household they create together exemplifies the values of progressive citizenship.

Stern’s later autobiographical novel, *I am a Woman – and a Jew*, written under the name Leah Morton in 1926, after the passage of immigration restriction, looks more closely at the American made, and particularly at the American marriage and the offspring created by what in that text is explicitly a Jewish-Christian intermarriage. Unlike in *Salome* or *Their Fathers’ God*, the marriage proves lasting, but it fails to blur the boundaries of race. Instead, Leah discovers that, “In my love, alone, there is no marking line of Jew and Gentile . . . But my children did mark that line – they marked it and were preparing to stand on the strangers’ side. I meant to see that they shall feel glad, proud and glad, to stand on my side. Yes, as my father said, ‘with our people’” (pp. 360–1). In order to define that people and to insist that she and her children belong to them, Leah turns now too to that popular discourse of race:

[N]ow I knew . . . what every Jew is and does, is something which must, indeed, belong to his people; that no other people living have our peculiar quality, which is not individual, but racial, and which gives to each of us who accomplished with genius, the ability to express through himself only the accumulated genius of the race, so that every Jewish writer, statesman, actor, is not only himself, but the mirror of his people, the voice of his people.

I did not feel part of the Jewish State. I did not need it. But the Jewish nation does not need the boundaries of a land, it does not require the frontier of a physical country. Each of us carries the boundaries, the acknowledgment of its sovereignty, in our hearts, in our blood . . . (pp. 358–9)

By locating Jewishness in her blood, Leah seeks to transform her own apparently inescapable Jewishness into a positive identity that she then forcibly affixes to her children, claiming it as a physical and immutable reality. Leah completely removes the element of choice from her definition of Jewish identity, proclaiming:

The citizen chose his country, with reason, with love. But the Jew in me could, by no choice, no reasoning, elect to be anything but a Jew: that was part of the life which poured through my veins; it had come to me in my mother's womb, before I had thought, before I had being. (pp. 359–60)

By separating the citizen from the Jew, nation from race, Leah overturns the idea of assimilation, arguing that even when one chooses to become an American, one nevertheless always remains a Jew.

Why the insistence on racial difference in the novels of this period? In part, their authors reflected and responded to the claims of the dominant culture, turning its racialization of them into a point of pride. At the same time, however, this move, particularly in novels of interracial marriage, can also be read as evidence that Europeans who had made it into the United States before 1924 and their children were beginning to successfully Americanize. Without the constant renewal of an old-world presence in the United States through what had been the daily arrival of immigrants from their homelands, assimilating immigrants sought to understand what would happen to the identities these greenhorns represented for them. Claiming racial difference became a way for them to police the boundaries of group identity by asserting, in the face of assimilation, a lasting distinctiveness that does not demand cultural or religious practice, endogamy, or even what would later be called by Herbert Gans "symbolic ethnicity" (9), but does articulate the sense of uniqueness and desire for its preservation true to the emotional realities of the individual, the collective, and indeed the nation.

This racialized mode of asserting a distinguishing identity would fade in popularity in the mid-1930s as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt promoted a more inclusive nationalism to support first the New Deal and then the war effort. As Eric Goldstein recounts, economic recovery and military success increased national optimism, transforming white ethnics from sources of anxiety into symbols of a new national narrative of unity and (white) inclusion that helped the United States define itself against the Nazi regime (pp. 189–94). "Immigrants all, Americans all" became the new watchword of a nation in need of unity against outside threats. With the tactics of Nazism discrediting the very concept of race, differences among white Americans were now described in terms of ethnicity and culture, not hierarchical and not insurmountable. But as Walter Benn Michaels suggests, "culture, put forward as a way of preserving the primacy of identity while avoiding the embarrassments of blood, would turn out to be much more . . . a way of reconceptualizing and thereby preserving the essential contours of racial identity" and particularly the idea of the nation as a plurality of distinctive groups (p. 13). When the time was right, the multiple groupings of white Europeans would reemerge under the banner of ethnicity.

Ethnicity "Revived"

As has been well documented, the late 1960s saw a "revival of ethnicity," a return to a public discussion of group difference as significant and as valuable, but now framed

in the language of ethnicity and expressed through distinctive cultural practices and a resurgence of interest in homelands, that for most were never actually home. Despite cautiousness with the idea of “race,” connection was often still understood and justified through the tropes of blood and ancestors. Matthew Jacobson has argued that the Civil Rights movement made it undesirable for “white ethnics” to identify with the white mainstream. Not wishing to be associated with the oppressor, they sought to distinguish themselves by emphasizing difference in modes similar to black nationalists. Furthermore, as minority status began to bestow apparent privilege, in the form of affirmative action, for instance, it seemed increasingly desirable to identify as an outsider and underdog (Jacobson, 2006: 1–10).

At the same time that claims of ethnic distinctiveness served the political, social, and economic needs of each group, they also served the emotional needs of many individuals. As the optimism of the post-World War II era faded and the national turmoil of the late 1960s increased, ethnicity offered an apparent means of accessing an earlier, simpler, richer, more authentic life. Searching for a sense of history and connection, people looked back to the homelands and the urban ghettos of their grandparents, real and imagined. Texts of the immigration period discussed previously were “rediscovered,” republished, and taught, and new stories about this era were written. Many of these new texts express what Jacobson calls, “assimilation blues,” recasting assimilation in negative terms as a loss to assimilating subjects and their descendants (Jacobson, 2006: 132–50).

But the very act of bemoaning loss expresses the presence of a sense of or desire for connection that, though unfulfilled, seems to prove that something distinctive has been retained over the generations. The language through which this remnant has been recently described reappropriates and rewrites earlier tropes of connection. Mario Puzo’s popular 1969 novel *The Godfather*, for instance, opens with the sentence: “Amerigo Bonasera sat in New York Criminal Court Number 3 and waited for justice; vengeance on the men who had so cruelly hurt his daughter, who had tried to dishonor her” (p. 10). Amerigo, who “believes in America” and had “raised [his] daughter in the American fashion” (p. 29), finds that American mores destroy her and American justice fails him. In response, he turns to Don Corleone who asks “why do you fear to give your first allegiance to me?,” for in the world of this novel, an alternative, superior system of justice is to be found in the American manifestations of the Old World represented by the Godfather (p. 32). Though the novel and film based upon it were reviled by many in the Italian-American community for fixing violent stereotypes in the public mind, the values of justice, loyalty, and family depicted in the novel represent a much desired alternative to the dominant culture of the period.

While Puzo’s novel emphasizes relationships of blood, linking the characters to one another and to their ethnicity through racializing metaphors, the novel simultaneously suggests that Italianness can be acquired. Michael Corleone proves, much like Leah Morton, that it cannot be lost, for though he tries to separate from the family and absorb himself in America (represented by Dartmouth and Anglo-American women), the call of blood – of violence and father – brings him back to the fold. But the German-Irish *Consigliere*, Tom Hagen, taken in as a child by the Corleones and raised

as their own, as well as Michael's wife, Kay Adams, of the Boston Adamases, suggest that through acts of commitment, loyalty, and love, outsiders can assimilate to Italian-Americanness, an identity as desirable for Puzo as "true-Americanness" for Theodore Roosevelt. Italian-Americanness is in this novel a valuable American identity that is both hereditary and non-exclusive.

While Puzo looks back to Italian Long Island of the Don, other white ethnic authors of this period looked to homelands across the Atlantic for alternatives to their American present and sites of distinctiveness and continuity. In bemoaning the hollowness of present life in America, Henry Mark Petrakis' 1966 *Dream of Kings*, posits the homeland as a source of reinvigoration:

For he knew the roots were strong, the ground was fertile, his seed was part of the olive, the myrtle, the honeycomb, and the huge luscious grapes. His heart contained the wind and the stars. The stream of his blood ran through the enchanted caves where nymphs played, over jagged promontories on which wild shepherds danced, into valleys stained with the blood of heroes and giants.

(p. 26)

Not unlike Riis, Petrakis suggests an unbreakable connection to the homeland (in this case Greece) and its heroic past. By eroticizing and biologizing this connection, he, like Stern, makes it transferable through his seed.

In the post-1967 era, Jewish-Americans also looked to homeland as a means through which to assert a distinctive identity and set of commitments. As seen in the novels of Leon Uris, Herman Wouk, and Meyer Levin, to name only a few, many Jewish-Americans of Eastern European descent looked not to the homes from which they or recent ancestors emigrated, which had been irrevocably altered by the Holocaust, but to their ancient homeland of Israel, now a political reality. And like Petrakis, they explain their ties to it historically and hereditarily.

Of course not all would use Israel to center ethnic Jewish identity. For political and personal reasons, many Jewish-American writers have sought to distance themselves from Zionism, even as they try to distinguish themselves ethnically in the United States. Beginning with *Portnoy's Complaint* (1967), many of the works of Philip Roth, for instance, consider the complex relationship between American Jews and the State of Israel. In a series of relationships with Christian women who run the class gamut from a West Virginian coal miner's daughter to a daughter of the American Revolution, Alexander Portnoy first tries tirelessly to enter the American mainstream. "What I'm saying, Doctor, is that I don't seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their backgrounds – as though through fucking I will discover America. *Conquer* America – maybe that's more like it" (p. 235). But what Portnoy discovers is not that America, in its female form, won't have him, but that it leaves him utterly unsatisfied. Seeking fulfillment, sexual and otherwise, Portnoy turns to Israel, "home, where we're the WASPs!" and where he believes he belongs by blood (254). But in trying to claim Israel as he did America, through the bodies of women, and even wishing to commit himself to it through marriage, Portnoy finds not simply dissatisfaction but that he "*couldn't get it up in the State of Israel! How's that for symbolism, bub!*" (p. 257).

In attempting to belong first to America and then to his purported homeland, Portnoy discovers “I am a patriot too, you, only in another place! (Where I *also* don’t feel at home!)” (p. 271). He finds himself a diaspora Jew, a hybrid, whose very sense of not belonging anywhere defines him personally and links him to a history of Jewishness. As Diaspora Studies is making clear, the state of diaspora is for many a homeland in and of itself, one that revises the idea of nation and national narratives with implications that are only beginning to be understood.

Looking Forward, Looking Backward: Implications for New American Narratives

The resurgence of ethnicity in the late 1960s had immense impact on the nation, its self definition, and the parameters of belonging therein. As Matthew Jacobson argues, the new emphasis on ethnic distinctiveness, which became institutionalized by government and academia, created a new, dominant national narrative that turned away from the exclusivist Anglo-American conception of the nation to a construction of the United States as a “nation of immigrants.” In the process, however, it reinforced the black-white color line in the United States. It normalized European immigration, valorized its participants as hard-working, self-reliant, model Americans whose distinctiveness built America and whose assimilation is a national loss, and set them against the apparent failings of African-Americans and the new “non-white” immigrants (Jacobson, 2006: 1–10).

But along with African-Americans, these new immigrants and their children are again rewriting what it means to be American, and again revisiting and revising the tropes through which belonging and distinctiveness are claimed. When the dark skinned Puerto Rican protagonist of *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) sets out for the South to discover whether he will be treated as a Puerto Rican or a Negro, the writer Piri Thomas reflects a new understanding of the constructedness and social implications of race and the ways in which it interfaces with color and ethnicity. When the final scene of *The Namesake* (2003) closes on Christmas with its South Asian-American protagonist escaping his family’s seven-foot artificial tree to read a collection of short stories by the Russian author for whom he is named, Jhumpa Lahiri reflects upon the contours of hybridity in the United States. When Jing-mei (June) Woo travels to China in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) and Yolanda García returns to the Dominican Republic with the prayer “let this turn out to be my home” in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991: 11), Amy Tan and Julia Alvarez illustrate a new transnational reality facilitated by the technologies of connection that enable immigrants and their children to imagine not only being “of two worlds” but choosing to live in both. And when this transnationalism is described from the perspective of the native guide as in “Interpreter of Maladies” (1999) and *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), Lahiri and Jonathan Safran Foer reveal a new desire and need to understand ethnic-America from a global perspective. The continuities and discontinuities in context, concerns,

values, perspective, form, and language among these texts and those of earlier European immigrants and their descendants suggest both the shared and distinctive experiences that continually inform the writing and rewriting of "America."

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Narrating Terror and Trauma: Racial Formations and “Homeland Security” in Ethnic American Literature¹

Shirley Geok-lin Lim

How are race identities imagined in American ethnic texts (poetry, memoirs and autobiographies, novels, and dramas) as varied as D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded*, Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart*, John Okada’s *No-No Boy*, N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, Philip Kan Gotando’s *The Wash*, John Wideman’s *Philadelphia Fire*, and Lan Cao’s *Monkey Bridge*? Many can be read as narratives of memory of a non-US-state location, stories located either in indigenous communities or in diasporic origins. These narratives may be said to perform identities that pose alternative histories to those offered in master narratives of triumphal immigrant entry, social uplift, and the achievement of becoming “American,” like those plotted in Euro-American works such as Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* or Mary Antin’s *The Promised Land*. Many of these non-US-state-situated texts function as subaltern histories that critique Americanization as a violent dynamic of constructing sameness. Sameness secures a national *unum* against the fears of disunity and fragmentation posed by the forms of difference always implicit in *pluribus*.

These other American texts, while inscribing particular and diverse ethnographic materials to establish their counter-histories, may share common features. Many express the pervasiveness of policing apparatuses and of threatening majority, white institutions. In some, the structure of the Western *bildungsroman* or novel of development, usually associated with a progressive, Enlightenment optimism, is fragmented, its narrative of upward mobility subjected to wariness and doubt. Narrative closures may be tentative, incomplete, skeptical, or refused. Actions and character suggest an anti-*bildungsroman* in which characters and their often broken bodies are produced through trauma. In such texts, storytelling becomes inseparable from acts of mourning.

Such profound wounding of individuals and communities characterized as “non-white” may be seen as related to the now-medicalized condition known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This common diagnostic category describes

symptoms rising out of emotionally traumatic experience. PTSD entered the *American Psychiatric Association Manual* in 1980 as denoting a real illness affecting men and women in all strata of society. An event is said to be traumatic when the threat of or an actual death or injury to one's self or others is present, leading to overwhelming fear and horror and feelings of helplessness. Symptoms of the disorder are usually said to be the presence of intrusions (flashbacks, nightmares, involuntary associations) when the memory of the trauma persistently returns. Such involuntary painful memories – of imprisonment, loss of social dignity and economic livelihood – may lead to avoidance, when the sufferer attempts to silence or forget the event and so avoids any suggestion that might arouse the memory. Hyperarousal, seen in hyper vigilance or increased startle response, accompanies such avoidance. According to psychologists, depression, anxiety, and dissociation may also follow on traumatic experiences.²

Some commentators and politicians have referred to September 11, 2001 as a critical moment reshaping the ways in which Americans perceive their security in the world to explain the Bush foreign policy of preemptive strikes.³ The fear of terrorist incursions on security, whether domestic, public or military, leading to counter-violence and policies to contain or rid the body politic of this threat, and the resulting traumas rising from such actions are not, however, new themes particular to the post-September 11th regime. Rather, these fears and traumas form fairly common and frequently re-imagined historical subjects, deployed by American authors, particularly authors of ethnic/people of color identity. This chapter reviews selected Native American, African-American, and Asian-American works for traces of earlier homeland security crises and representations of interpersonal, social, political and military violence. These works, as well as many Latino/a texts, such as Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*, Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit*, or Helena Viromontes' "The Cariboo Café" suggest that stories of terrorism and homeland-associated violence form a crucial part of the constructions of race, class, and gender identities that together compose and produce the US nation.

Indeed, as historians never tire of noting, the United States of America was formed out of revolutionary violence and consecrated during the Civil War, as famously expressed in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, in blood. We know that there were over a million casualties out of a population of 35 million during the Civil War. About 360,000 Union soldiers died, and 275,175 Union soldiers were wounded; on the Confederate side, 260,000 soldiers were killed and as many wounded. The successful agricultural and industrial development of the continent and later of the Hawaiian islands occurred over centuries of genocidal treatment of native peoples. In *Seeds of Extinction*, Bernard W. Sheehan observed that

by the latter part of the eighteenth century, that long-held mission to subdue the continent and obliterate the last vestiges of the savage world became more than a definition of how things ought to be or even how they would eventually become. Instead it became an immediate imperative that seemed entirely within reach.

(Sheehan, 1973: 5)

Twentieth-century ethnic-identified memoirs and fictions offer radical revisions of the heroic story of US exceptionalism, to narrate, from the perspective of the Other, American history as part of a traumatizing European-diasporic story of colonial violence, economic rapacity, and extermination and destruction of indigenous, non-white populations and environments. That these texts are read and taught as part of American literature underlines the on-going dialogical nature of American ideology and the writing that is generated by such dialogism.

Today, re-reading ethnic American texts from within the locus of contemporary American power, a distinctive framework for understanding American culture and society comes into focus. The discourse of ethnic literature powerfully links “the world” and “the home” in a single image for which we may adapt the phrase “homeland security.” All the recent domestic lawmaking on homeland security were offered as new measures for a new desperate historical moment. However, in ethnic American texts, we find reflections, expressions, themes, characters, plots, passages, images, ideas, concepts that weirdly and chillingly prefigure and anticipate many of the emotive and rhetorical strategies that characterize homeland security discourse.

“Homeland security,” as the term has been deployed, evokes the image of a domestic territory under siege, under threat of assault and potential loss of that territory to forces outside of that sphere so cozily conjured in the word “home.” In the OED, “home” with its source in the Teutonic root “heim,” is defined as both local dwelling and global in reach, signifying “world.” Used in games, the OED reminds us, “home” denotes a space safe from attack. “Homeland” connotes not simply a piece of real estate – land – but a totalizing abstraction fusing historical possession, founded on genealogical logic, rousing associations with value, group identity, familial bonds and affections, past and future continuities, and the vulnerabilities of women and children. It carries as well a rather militarized association with territory, defenses, state and national status, and so forth. The urgent need to secure the “homeland” implies the existence of external dangers, establishes a perimeter, a border to be guarded between safe good home and unsafe world with its many potential risks and threats.

But it is also clear that “homeland security” encompassed perhaps even greater fears, including the fear that the homeland itself is not a safe space; that it is already riddled with sleeper cells, not simply illegal immigrants but also indigenous peoples of the continent and US citizens who have been ideologically constituted to commit acts of terrorism and thus bring down the home, conceptually synonymous with the nation. This kind of threat from populations within, to be contained by vigorous police action, forms the central conflict in many Native American fictions, including Leslie Marmon Silko’s and Louise Erdrich’s works. In McNickle’s *The Surrounded* and Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, Archilde Leon and Abel are wounded male characters, having to come to terms and failing to do so with the violent encounter between white Christian authority and an Indian cultural past now decimated or entirely vanished. Toward the novels’ conclusions, the deaths of the Indian mother and Indian grandfather gesture to

the end of continuity with Indian identity; both ancestral figures suggest a past that testifies to a present absence, the present absence which is the result of a US history of genocide. In *The Surrounded*, the remnants of Flathead Indians, whose culture is presented as almost vanquished under the erasure brought about by Christian missionaries and white society, come under the defensive/aggressive gaze of the sheriff, Dave Quigley, and the Indian agent, Mr. Parker. Archilde's arrest for his girlfriend Elise's killing of the sheriff, suggests the "surrounded" circumstances of Indian identity, a surroundedness or entrapment that pushes the Indian to violence even as his body and psyche come under unrelenting violation.

In *House Made of Dawn*, as in his earlier memoir/history/poem *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, Momaday narrates the deliberate wholesale slaughter of the buffalo, which historically formed the economic mainstay of the Plains Indians, the repression of the Ghost Dances, which began as a cultural resistance to encroaching white society, and with these federal policies, the destruction of Indian civilization. Engaging Momaday's memory-text necessarily engages a reader with the historical trauma of US military violence visited on the Indians. In the 1880s, the Sioux and other Native American groups turned to the religion of the Ghost Dance as a spiritual means to save their cultures. Wavoka, a Paiute shaman, had preached that the practice of the Ghost dances would call forth visions of ancestors who would lead the Indians to victory against the white settlers. The US military moved to repress the Ghost Dance ceremonies, and in 1890, the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old regiment, massacred 300 Indians, many of them women and children, who had gathered at Wounded Knee to escape the troopers. In *House Made of Dawn*, Momaday again repeats the story of the trauma not so much of massacre but of cultural extinction:

My grandmother had a reverence for the sun, a certain holy regard which now is all but gone out of mankind . . . She was ten when the Kiowas came together for the last time as a living sun dance culture. They could find no buffalo; they had to hang an old hide from the sacred tree . . . Before the dance could begin, a company of armed soldiers rode out from Fort Sill under orders to disperse the tribe. Forbidden without cause the essential act of their faith, having seen the wild herds slaughtered and left to rot upon the ground, the Kiowas backed away from the tree. That was July 20, 1890, at the great bend of the Washita. My grandmother was there. Without bitterness, and for as long as she lived, she bore a vision of decide.

(Momaday, 1999: 122)

Such stories, retold in fiction and poetry by Native American authors, now circulate and trouble the once-popular Hollywood version of innocent homesteaders terrorized by scalp-hunting savages. Arguably, because of these narrative interventions, the old Hollywood version may be said to possess less and less purchase on the American popular imagination today.

American Indian narratives that explicitly thematize the terrors accompanying a history of genocide on their communities share a similar historical deep structure with

Asian-American texts, in that representations of Asian-American communities may be viewed as aesthetically negotiated on the traces of trauma. In her excellent study, Kathleen McHugh looks at the “possibility of an aesthetics predicated” on the explicit interaction of trauma and self-representation (2000: 241), and argues that “representation – historical, fictional, autobiographical, memorial – constitutes the most highly charged stake in trauma studies, confronting historians, survivors, theorists, and artists with an ethical contradiction that inexorably raises aesthetic questions” (pp. 242–43). Aesthetics – the imaginative truth of that literary work – is wedded to trauma precisely because of representation’s failure to ever adequately “apprehend the (traumatic) referent” (p. 243). That is, these ethnic texts are characterized by an aesthetics of deliberate gaps and slippages, a mystery – in the Gospel sense of a story of travail and suffering – of forgetting and remembering, that is repeatedly suggested in the distance established between the historical context of trauma narrative and their acts of representation.

M.M. Bakhtin had theorized the novel as a genre

defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour . . . this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.

(Bakhtin, 1998: 263)

Stratification and heteroglossia insure the dynamics of linguistic life (p. 272); and in “Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin pays special attention to dialogized heteroglossia (p. 273). Taking Bakhtin’s subtle unpacking of the integral relation between formal stylistics and the socio-political life of the text, we can read the violent traces of homeland insecurity in US ethnic texts through dialogical features as theorized by the African-American activist and intellectual, W.E.B. Du Bois.

Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness, of veiling, arguably continues to possess extraordinary resonance and salience not only in African-American literature, but also in other contemporary US ethnic discourses. For one thing, although US society has been progressively transformed in the twentieth century, the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 60s did not, by any means, resolve all of the nation’s race-based tensions and problems. For critics, the paradigm of double consciousness and veiling may be read as prefiguring in a different rhetorical mode many of the structural and stylistic features that characterize ethnic US writing as well as the deep-structure psychoanalytic features that are currently used to explain contemporary racialized representations. Du Bois’s double consciousness, of being both American and not American, of being other, a difference almost always viewed as minority, inferior, subordinate, lower, criminal, and thus an unwelcome subject, a threat to social order, a contagion

on the body politic, and so forth, is clearly not a condition restricted to the “sons of night,” but may be said to characterize most, if not all, minority texts. This model, of a power matrix constructed along the lines of hegemon and subaltern or counter-hegemon, is today viewed as distributed across not simply a binary of black and white but rather across complex pyramidal or multiply located and plural nodes and stratifications of raced, classed, and gendered identities. The matrix, the rhizome, the net or the web, by now, form more useful structures for understanding ethnic American narrative structures in which repressive majority state apparatuses are set at war against minority subjects.

Du Bois noted in 1903 that the Negro, those constructed as the “sons of night” in distinction from “everything white,” is a “sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world.” “This double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” is the condition of “two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (Du Bois, 1903: 3). Despite his use of the naturalizing term “born,” Du Bois’s opening thought on the warring state of the Negro in the US at the beginning of the twentieth century should not be taken as suggesting an organic condition. There is nothing natural about the condition of double consciousness. Indeed, later in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois elaborates on the Negro condition as rising directly from racism, from “the problem of the color line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (p. 10). In the chapter, “Of the dawn of freedom,” Du Bois rigorously connects the dots, establishing the condition of subaltern or minority double consciousness with the history of slavery and Reconstruction. He observed ironically,

In the most cultural sections and cities of the South the Negroes are a segregated servile caste, with restricted rights and privileges. Before the courts, both in law and custom, they stand on a different and peculiar basis. Taxation without representation is the rule of their political life

(Du Bois, 1903: 29)

and thus he concludes, “On the tainted air there broods fear.” The history of Ku Klux Klan terrorism beginning with the Reconstruction era and of lynching of African-Americans increasing in intensity and numbers in the first half of the twentieth century form the historical context for the reception of Du Bois’s essay. The fear that broods over the tainted air of the South serves as a shorthand for the centuries of terror that kept blacks segregated and subjugated. Racism as terrorism that produces double consciousness and the collective traumatic history of black America gets repeatedly narrativized in African-American writing. It appears, for example, as the ghost of Beloved in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, as the lost member in August Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, and as contemporary refigurations of unspeakable histories of violence in John Wideman’s *Philadelphia Fire*. Indeed, Henry Louis Gates “sees double

consciousness at the core of ‘each black text written in a Western language’ – revealing ‘a double heritage, two-toned . . . double-voiced’” (cited Scott McLemee, 2003: A 17).

Published almost a century after Du Bois’s acute political analysis, Wideman’s 1990 novel *Philadelphia Fire* fictionalizes the 1985 firebombing by police of a West Philadelphia row house owned and inhabited by members of an Afrocentric, Rastafarian cult, Move. The cult organization’s self-ascribed name, Move, gestures to that desire on the part of black Americans that Du Bois had noted, the desire for social, moral, and intellectual uplift. But in the terrible logic of the terrorist state, such uplift sentiments, the wish to pass from ignominy to patrimony, from dispossession to self-possession, are impermissible and dangerous for blacks on US soil, producing in this instance an ironic, devastating passage from health to death.

Cudjoe, an African-American journalist and writer, leaves a near paradisaical island sojourn to return to the black ghettos of Philadelphia in order to track down the surviving boy last seen fleeing naked from this holocaust.

What Cudjoe has discovered is that the boy was last seen naked skin melting, melting, the go do-do-do-do-do-do-do like that skin melting Stop kids coming out stop stop kids coming out skin melting do-do-do-do-do-do like that going off – like bullets were going after each other do-do-do-do fleeing down an alley between burning rows of houses. Only one witness. A sharpshooter on a roof who caught the boy’s body in his telescopic sight just long enough to know he’d be doomed if he pulled the trigger, doomed if he didn’t. In that terrible light pulsing from the inferno of fire-gutted houses the boy flutters, a dark moth shape for an instant wheeling, then fixed forever in the cross hairs of the infrared sniperscoped night-visioned weapon trained on the alley. At that same instant an avalanche of bullets hammers what could be other figures, other children back into boiling clouds of smoke and flame. The last sighting reports the boy alone, stumbling, then upright. Then gone again as quickly as he appeared.”

(Wideman, 1990: 8)

This vivid, recurrent, phantasmic image, driving forward the narrative of Cudjoe’s, the flawed male’s, internal wrenches and the externalized relentless criticism of America, the police state, is also deliberately an echo, a shadow or reiteration of that iconic figure of child victim to US fire power, the much reproduced image of the little naked Vietnamese girl set on fire by napalm, crying and running down a village road. Charles Simic says of this famous photograph by Huynh Cong U that it is both shocking and beautiful, “the way a depiction of excruciating torments of some martyr can be in a painting,” and quotes the photographer Helen Levitt’s point that “The aesthetic is in reality itself” (Simic, 2003: 9). In the collapsed, palimpsest of images of inner-city black boy with Vietnamese, peasant village girl, Wideman’s text vividly literalizes the broad historical irony of state terrorism in the name of homeland security, practiced as domestic policy on black America and as foreign policy in Vietnam. The passage works through effects more often associated with poetry: staccato syntax, multiple clause sentences building up to an intensity of image and action, repetition of sounds mimicking the sound of bullets being fired, dramatic pacing and rhythms

all express of Cudjoe's passionate, enraged search for answers to the missing child and the missing explanations for the killings. The extra-literariness of the prose suggests not merely a reportorial description of the police action but an evolving identification of the journalist-character with the voiceless black child, and, through this child-figure, with the trace of that Vietnamese child; that is, with universal innocence wounded and fleeing from state fire. The novel's obsession with this image gestures toward the presence of a double consciousness, one of cynical complicity with the adult world of power, and the other of profound psychic identification with suffering powerlessness.

Asian-American texts that foreground histories and images of repressive state apparatuses and acts of terrorism against unwelcome immigrants and citizens, as in *Philadelphia Fire*, while common, have not always been read in these contexts. Japanese-American writing on the community's internment history has been the most widely received. For those who know something of American history, September 11, 2001 was not the first time that an enemy attack on US soil occurred. On December 7, 1941, Japan in a preemptive strike against the United States, bombed Pearl Harbor in the American territory of Hawaii. An armada of 60 Japanese ships, six of them carriers bearing 360 planes, crossed 3,000 miles of the Pacific undetected. In a few short hours, Japanese pilots and gunners crippled the US Pacific based navy; 2,403 American sailors died, and 1,178 were wounded. Some Americans (including ex-President Bush, who declared on his return to Washington DC from Hawaii early in his Presidency that he was glad to be back in the United States) continue to view Hawaii as not part of the United States of America. Nonetheless, despite the President's sentiments, the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the destruction of the World Trade Towers on September 11 are not unique when seen in the context of that other infamous attack 60 years ago. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, in response to this national trauma, President Franklin Roosevelt and his Cabinet set in motion a series of policies, culminating in Executive Order 9066, that evacuated 120,000 Japanese-Americans out of their West Coast homes to fairgrounds and stables at race tracks and thence to 11 internment camps scattered in the interior and desert areas of the continent. Some historians like Greg Robinson now argue that President Roosevelt was able to sign Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, barely two months after Pearl Harbor, because his own anti-Japanese sentiments had led him to prepare for just such an exclusionary measure. When dissenters such as Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Minoru Yasui refused to obey the exclusion orders and to report to the internment camps, they were prosecuted and sent to federal prison.

The Pacific War/internment history of citizens of Japanese descent has been represented through poetry (poems by Mitsuye Yamada, Janice Mirikitani, and Lawson Inada, for example), memoir (see Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*), fiction (e.g., Milton Murayama's *All I Asking for is My Body*, John Okada's *No-No Boy*, short stories by Hisaya Yamamoto), and visual images, documentaries and films (see Mine Okubo's *Citizen 13660*, Rea Tajiri's "History and Memory"). In this instance, the policy of homeland security for the general population,

presented as only possible on the basis of terror and homelessness for the minority, has been so frequently criticized as to be left with few defenders.⁴ In fact, in 1984, Koretatsu's conviction was overturned, and the internment camps and exclusionary acts were ruled in violation of the constitutional rights of Japanese-Americans, and in 1988, President Reagan signed the Redress Act, which included both an apology and \$20,000 to every surviving internee.⁵

The 1988 apology notwithstanding, Japanese-American literature by Nisei and Sansei authors continues to limn the psychological, social, and economic effects of this history. Jeanne Waksatsuki Houston and James Houston's memoir, *Farewell to Manzanar*, powerfully follows the strong immigrant Japanese-American father's collapse as he is first picked up by the FBI and sent to Federal prison:

[Papa] didn't struggle. There was no point to it. He had become a man without a country. The land of his birth was at war with America; yet after thirty-five years here he was still prevented by law from becoming an American citizen. He was suddenly a man with no rights who looked exactly like the enemy.

(Houston and Houston, 1973: 6)

Papa loses his boat and fishing livelihood, later is permitted to join his family at the internment camp at Manzanar, becomes an alcoholic shunned by his fellows internees as a possible traitor, turns to wife abuse (pp. 47–51), and even after release from Manzanar, never recovers his "tremendous dignity" (p. 6) as powerful patriarch in his daughter's esteem. Papa's pathetic social deterioration can be read as falling in a narrative tradition of wounded masculine figures rising out of the trauma of twoness – not American but not Japanese – that appears in much internment literature:

Ever more vulnerable, Papa began drinking heavily again. And I would watch with sorrow and disgust, unable then to imagine what he was going through . . . I couldn't understand why he was home all day, when mama had to go out working. I was ashamed of him for that and, in a deeper way, for being what had led to our imprisonment, that is, for being so unalterably Japanese.

(p. 119)

Such wounding of masculinity initiates Papa's decline in *Farewell to Manzanar*, from proud and successful provider to defeated male who becomes an alcoholic to forget and abusive in order to retain some semblance of dominance.

Understanding the dramatization here of the consequences of the trauma of internment on Japanese-American male subjectivity, the reader may begin to trace this trauma narrative in what may appear to be a very different kind of text, Philip Kan Gotanda's play, *The Wash*. Reading ethnic American writing for the traces of a tradition of trauma narrative, we need to be constantly conscious of the historicity of the texts. The past, with its burden of traumatic events, is often only available through textualized form and comes to us through layered processes – through the discursive practices of the time, through our own contemporary reading lens, and through

the medium of language. *The Wash* is purportedly a domestic drama of a failed marriage, but the marital collapse can only be understood in the context of a history of Japanese-American gender and familial relations, social relationships which come out of the history of internment. The play was written and performed in 1985 at the height of the redress/reparation movement. The play may be said to present a new way of thinking about the internment experience by re-situating it in the 1980s, and thus it contains textual traces to at least two pasts, that of the camps 40 years before and that of the moment of redress testimonies, when repressed memories begin to appear and Nisei silence is broken. Beginning in the mid-1970s, Japanese-Americans began openly seeking reparations for their losses, and the Japanese-American Citizens League formed a National Committee for Redress. At the 1978 convention, the JAACL adopted a resolution calling for reparation of \$25,000 for each internee, and Congress agreed to create a commission on the subject. After decades of silence, former internees began to speak of their experiences and losses, and testimonies to the commission from 750 individuals stunned both the Japanese-American and the national community.

Gotanda's play suggests the trauma evident in repressed memory, shame, and absent history, and encompasses many of the major themes of silence, repression of the past, continuing psychological and social repercussions of past injustices, moving on, inability to move on, male wounds, and so forth that became clarified in the testimonies, when the Nisei (and some Issei) finally began telling their stories. Gotanda chose to imagine Nisei characters for whom the internment was a defining life moment – trauma as turning point resulting in their loss of self-esteem (“manhood”), and failure as economic and social being. As drama, *The Wash* is dialogical in form. Trauma narrative is carried through dialogue; but even more so through setting, costume, spectacle, props, music, appearance, actions, gesture, pace, etc. – the dramaturgical elements that characterize dramas as collaborative, communal, immediate performance. In such performance, silences and pauses may be as significant as spoken language. Visual effects become primary, and a different kind of language of gesture and sign come to the fore. *The Wash* is thus a communal symbolic action, a public enactment of the community's hurts. It enacts generational conflicts, gender conflicts, and race and class divisions in its replaying of the history of internment. Closer to the tradition of social drama epitomized in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, like Miller's play it deliberately evokes elements of Greek tragedy, most seen in the deployment of a clown figure, Blackie, and in the chorus role played by Chiyo.

The psychological dimensions of the characters' interactions spring from the central factor of Nobu's damaged male subjectivity: Nobu's failure as a husband and father, Masi's entrapment as wife and mother, finally able to make a break for happiness late in life, the daughters' exasperation at their parents' messy relations, the charm of a widower happy to be courting the frustrated woman. Nobu, as the flawed anti-hero, is painfully static, unable to respond to the emotional urgencies of the characters around him. At strategic moments in the drama, he regresses into events of 40 years ago. In *Death of a Salesman*, slow revelations through flashbacks explain Willy Loman's

regression into a happier time, the estrangement between Willy and his son Biff, and Willy's guilt over Biff's lack of success in life. The major emotional focus, however, in *The Wash* is not on generational conflict but on marital and sexual dysfunction. Masi begins like Linda in *Death of a Salesman* as submissive wife but is transformed through Sadao's loving tutelage to sexual and psychic health and finally leaves Nobu.

A number of conflicts are set into motion in the play, all of them radiating out of Nobu. Like a dark mystery, Nobu's stubborn incommunicability gets parsed until his fragile ego is exposed under grievances lying under layers of individual and community history. Internment history explains Nobu's sexual dysfunction as the result of decades of suspicion that Masi's affections had been for another man, someone who had been at the camp with them but who had volunteered to serve in the army and was killed during World War II. Chester's death, which made it impossible for Masi to continue in this first love relationship, resulted in her marriage to Nobu, someone, she confesses to Sadao, whom she had never really loved (Gotando, 2000: 186). Even 40 years later, losses incurred because of the internment continue to fuel Nobu's anger at his father-in-law's broken promise to set him up in the produce business, a promise broken because the Federal Government had taken the father-in-law's farm away from him (p. 201).

The play dramatizes Nobu as a Nisei who is more identified with Issei characteristics. While Nisei and Sansei characters appear in the play, more complex distinctions are made among the older Japanese-Americans, who may be seen as separated into America-born Japanese-Americans – also distinguished as Nisei (more American-identified, like Masi and Sadao, and English-educated) – and Issei (more Japanese identified, Japanese school educated), like Nobu. Nobu is more comfortable using Japanese than English; he sings Japanese lullabies, prefers Japanese food, and identifies with Masi's Issei father in work ethic and class aspirations (p. 203). *The Wash* overtly plays on the overlap of Issei male features with the American masculine stereotype of the strong, silent male. In Nobu's character, we find a nuanced criticism of this male figure. Nobu is less strong than he is disabled or unable to respond in the ways that will bring him satisfaction. His daughters view him critically as less silent than repressed, uncommunicative, fearful, rigid, and clueless. Nobu's wounded maleness is contrasted with Sadao's. The contrast between the two male characters as they "perform" their relations with Masi is so clearly demarcated as to be almost formulaic (p. 191–2). Nobu's character can only be explained in the context of the US government's traumatizing treatment of Japanese-Americans in the 1940s, a history that still has negative consequences for surviving internees. Economic and sexual failure began for Nobu 40 years ago, and explains his on-going deeply sedimented sense of defeat, loss of self-esteem, and defensive pride. Nobu's ensuing rigidity, remarked on by all the women in his life, arises from the urgent psychic need to hold on to security. His need to control, a central feature of his character, may be seen as a response to his loss of autonomy during the internment years.

The Wash offers a discursive construction of masculinity that is both Issei-identified and drawn from a US war model. The male figure is self-represented as strong, silent,

in control, and not exhibiting emotion. The play thus shows a collusion of two cultural modes in an ironic recognition of overlap (p. 200). Sadao (pp. 178–81), talkative, communicating feelings, praiseful, generous, giving and teacherly, is emotional and unafraid of affection. Whether crying or cooking, he exhibits behaviors, attitudes and values usually associated with the feminine (p. 191). Under his influence, Masi learns to fish, play cards and gamble. She learns to accept Sadao's cooking and ministering to her and even takes over some stereotypically male positions, thus growing less typed into the female roles of submissive servant and nurturer that marriage with Nobu had forced her into. In the play close attention needs to be paid to Nobu's silence, his inarticulate sentences, and the stage directions that note "no response" when Nobu is addressed by various characters. At the same time, Nobu also breaks into longer speeches, particularly after he breaks down in the face of Masi's decision to divorce him (p. 215). That is, "Discourse is not just a way of speaking or writing, but the whole 'mental set' and ideology which encloses the thinking of all members of a given society" (Barry, 2002: 176); and voluntary and involuntary silence as well as voluntary and involuntary speech may be said to figure the symptoms of Nobu's passage through his traumatized sensibility. Sadao's speeches are almost all longer, smoother, and more elaborate than Nobu's. In these two contrasting types of speech acts, Nobu's breakdown (pp. 212–13) is heralded by unusual eruption into excited speech, then by the symbolic violence of the shotgun, which like Nobu's rage, is finally seen as empty.

The overarching symbol offered in the title, the wash, plays on the notion of dirty clothes or dirty linen which in a community fearful of public shame must never be washed in public. The wash keeps in central view a community's shame, the shame of familial dysfunction, of internment, and the fear of exposure of secrets, family weaknesses and skeletons, including the secret of the internment and its many losses. Nobu's character is represented as riven by fear and shame: fear of exposure of his emotional weaknesses; shame over his economic failure; shame over his daughter Judy's marriage to an African-American, leading to his rejection of his mixed-marriage grandson, Jimmy.

The repressive structure at work in *The Wash* radiates chiefly from Nobu, but also can be observed as operating in Masi's actions: her refusal to confess to Nobu that she had spent the evening 40 years ago talking with Chester, to admit that she had married Nobu as a rebound after Chester's death, and to understand till very late that marital life had not been satisfactory for her:

- NOBU: Remember that dance you were supposed to meet me out front of the canteen?
 We were all going to meet there and then go to the dance together . . .
 I waited and waited . . .
- MASI: Nobu, that was forty years ago.
- NOBU: Yeah, I know, but remember you were supposed to meet –
- MASI: That's forty years ago. How can I remember something like that?
- NOBU: You didn't show up. Chester didn't show up either . . .
- NOBU: Where were you, huh?

MASI: How am I supposed to remember that far back? Chester died in Italy with the rest of the 442 boys.

NOBU: Where the hell were you?

(Gotando, 2000: 186)

Masi's decades-long silence on her betrayal of Nobu with Chester has deep psychic consequences for their relationship. Nobu's experiences during internment were thus doubly traumatic; traumatized by the powerlessness of the interned and by Masi's emotional betrayal. Such unforgotten events explain Nobu's passivity, his low self-esteem and inability to respond positively to others' needs, his fear of impotence and hence his very emotional impotence itself. As he says to Masi when she asks him why he had not shown any sexual interest in her for years, "Look. Look at me. You call this a catch? You still want this?" (p. 190).

While Masi's attempts to liberate herself result in her separation from Nobu and loving fulfillment with Sadao, Nobu must learn how to resist the repressive authority that is his projection of himself in the world. Because he has suffered a loss of control and autonomy during the internment, he must assert rigid control at all times. Because he fears being overwhelmed by emotions, he must avoid emotions at all cost. Because he fears vulnerability to those he loves most, he must show himself invulnerable, unmoved by, unconcerned with those whom he loves most. The play's discursive practices suggest a criticism of the state power that had interpellated Nobu as a disempowered subject. Forty years after the internment, he retains an interned subjectivity, imprisoned by disempowering, disabling forces set loose among the Nisei community after Pearl Harbor. Nobu's grievances, attitudes and actions 40 years later are symptomatic of the trauma of male wounding, rising from these losses:

NOBU: If I was running that store it woulda been different. (Pause)

And your old man said he'd get me that store.

MASI: It wasn't his fault. He didn't plan on the war, Nobu.

NOBU: He promised he could set me . . .

MASI: IT WASN'T HIS FAULT!

(*Silence*)

Who wanted to be in the relocation camps? Did you? Do you think he wanted to be in there? It broke Papa's heart. He spent his entire life building up that farm. Papa was a proud man. A very proud man. It broke his heart when he lost it.

(Gotando, 2000: 203)

What Masi does not say but what the play makes clear is that Nobu also lost something intrinsically valuable during the internment, and that psychic loss, of male pride and trust, is still breaking his heart, and damaging his ability to relate to others.

Reading the play not simply in the context of internment but in parallel fashion with the discourse of reparation clarifies its representation of the psychic, emotional and communal harm done to the Nisei, almost all of whom did not articulate their

pain and losses until the testimonies called for in the Redress movement in the 1980s. In this context, Masi's defensiveness, her excuse that she cannot be expected to remember events that occurred 40 years ago, will be viewed more critically. Despite the overt materials concerning Masi's liberation from a loveless home, the play is not a feminist expression of woman's release from an over-dominant partner. Rather it reinserts Nobu as a problematic figure for love and domestic reconciliation. Nobu, like Masi, learns about himself, but unlike Masi he has to learn about himself in relation not just to a new lover but also to multiple others – wife, daughters, grandchild, and his woman friend Kiyoko. Masi seeks and finds the satisfaction of a new partner and pleasure, but Nobu has a harder and larger curriculum. His need for security at home, figured by his need for Masi to play the role of nurturing mother and submissive female, and his failure to develop as a character, understood as reiterations of the traumatizing experiences of internment losses of male economic and social position and pride, haunt the play.

The historical experience of the US as "homeland" or as Gold Mountain, Gam Saan, has been likewise so overtly questioned and problematically represented in Chinese-American literature as to suggest a separate literary tradition from that capacious welcoming tradition called immigrant writing. In Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, the suturing of possessive individualism with nation formation appears seamless; but in many autobiographies by non-white subjects, homeland is split between origin and destination, and in that space of division the ethnic subject gets interpellated through tactics of terror. Thus, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, usually read as a feminist memoir that tells on the patriarchal evils of Chinese society, introduces disturbing historical materials too often elided by critics. What accounts, for example, for the silence of the Chinese girls in first grade? The narrator tells us "the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (Kingsto, 1976: 166). Yet these same girls in Chinese school "were not mute. They screamed and yelled during recess when there were no rules; they had fistfights" (p. 167). Later, when Maxine is in sixth grade she figures out the reason for Chinese immigrant silence in the presence of the white world: "My throat cut off the word. There were secrets never to be said in front of the ghosts, immigration secrets whose telling could send us back to China" (p. 183). The fear of deportation informs and deforms the ways in which family and kin communicate, and as Du Bois would say, such fear taints the air for the Asian-American child: "Lie to Americans. Tell them you were born during the San Francisco earthquake. Tell them your birth certificate and your parents were burned up in the fire. Don't report crimes; tell them we have no crimes and no poverty" (p. 184). Such passages in *The Woman Warrior* bear witness to the terrors brought upon a racially segregated group, "with restricted rights and privileges [who] before the courts, both in law and custom . . . stand on a different and peculiar basis."

China Men offers numerous examples of narratives of trauma. The chapter "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" condenses a long history of violent acts that sought to drive Chinese-American men out of the United States after they had completed building the Transcontinental Pacific Railroad. Here the passage uses the ironic device of disavowing even as it intones a litany of crimes, reiterating survival in

the repetitious litany of acts of extermination. The grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the railroad builder, was

Good at hiding, disappearing – decades unaccounted for – he was not working in a mine when forty thousand chinamen were Driven Out of mining. He was not killed or kidnapped in the Los Angeles Massacre, though he gave money toward ransoming those whose toes and fingers, a digit per week, and ears grotesquely rotting or pickled and scalped queues, were displayed in Chinatowns . . . He was lucky not to be in Colorado when the Denver demons burned all chinamen homes and businesses, nor in Rock Springs, Wyoming, when the miner demons killed twenty eight or fifty chinamen. The Rock Springs massacre began in a large coal mine owned by the Union Pacific; the outnumbered chinamen were shot in the back as they ran to Chinatown, which the demons burned. They forced chinamen out into the open and shot them; demon women and children threw the wounded back in the flames . . . The hunt went on for a month before federal troops came. The count of the dead was inexact because bodies were mutilated and pieces scattered all over the Wyoming Territory. No white miners were indicted, but the government paid \$150,000 in reparations to victims' families.

(Kingston, 1989: 148)

In a second example from *China Men*, the chapter, "The Laws," is written in impersonal form as straightforward exposition, adhering to actions and characters offered in language that approximates what is conventionally understood as expressing the methodology of history. Empirical, objective, factual, archivally recorded, chronologically sequenced and linear, such prose features generate a different dimension of character and action. The chief character here is the state, figured in the metonymic naming of "California," "San Francisco," "Congress," "The United States." Stretching from 1868 to 1979, the chapter maps the gradual shifts in a grand narrative of Chinese-American immigration, from the "restricted rights and privileges" standing "Before the courts, both in law and custom . . . on a different and peculiar basis" to the current instantiation of equal representation before the law.

In *China Men*, the progressive narrative finally counters and is seen to underlie that other narrative of terror and trauma. Social justice, the constraints on majority and state violence, rather than social injustice arguably form the thematics of many Asian-American novels. Still, these visions of moments of stability in the relations between ethnic subject and the American state, when the homeland is also securely vouchsafed for the ethnic body, seldom form resolutions in their plots. In novel after novel, it is the broken body and the assurance of future violence that conclude the narrative. The story of struggle for social justice stops, almost, it would seem, from weariness than from the dictates of plot. In *No-No Boy*, Ichiro comforts the Nisei veteran, Bull, as Bull weeps in remorse after causing Freddy's accidental death. In *Monkey Bridge*, Mai prepares herself for a new life as a college student and adopted daughter to an American veteran who had been in the Special Services in Vietnam only after the gruesome suicide of her Vietnamese refugee mother, and in *America is in the Heart*, Carlos, the narrator-protagonist, gets on a bus like all the buses he had taken, on a trip through

a territory in which he is not welcomed, after his brother finds salvation in the US by enlisting to serve in the army with the outbreak of the Pacific War.

The question of aesthetics in such narratives as *America is in the Heart* and *Monkey Bridge* must be delicately approached for these texts exhibit not so much the affects of “beauty” as the affects of terror, called forth through structures analogous to psychoanalytic structures now explained as symptomatic of trauma. According to Freud, painful experiences at early childhood are repressed, made inaccessible and placed into the unconscious, but they continue to have power to affect behavior irrationally. Recovery from symptoms has to do with recovering these memories, witnessing and testifying or talking about them; thus, healing and recovery are related to experiences of “re-memory” and “reenactment.” As Freud so elegantly phrased his ideas on the therapeutic process, “Where Id is, there Ego shall be” and “It takes two to witness the unconscious.” Bulosan’s putative autobiographical text retells numerous incidents of violence against the Pinoys, first-generation Filipino-American men arriving in the US as American colonial subjects but not citizens. The narrative’s unrelenting pace intensifies the drama of witnessing and living through terror unleashed by white anxiety rising out of displaced fears over the economic depredations of the depression years and of a fearful psychosexual response to the erotics of the brown body. Beginning with the scene on board ship, when a “young white girl wearing a brief bathing suit” says fearfully to her male companion, “Look at those half-naked savages from the Philippines” (Bulosan, 1991: 98), the Pinoys’ humanity, under white puritanical scrutiny, is reduced to criminal savagery. Unable to find work, Pinoys like Carlos’s brothers engage in bootlegging and petty theft. Speaking as a naïve, Carlos writes, “I was still unaware of the vast social implications of the discrimination against Filipinos . . . I was beaten up on several occasions by restaurant and hotel proprietors. I put the blame on certain Filipinos who had behaved badly in America” (p. 143). The chapter in which this passage appears continues with at least four separate anecdotes illustrating that “everywhere I went I saw white men attacking Filipinos” (p. 146), stories that add up to persuade the reader of the chapter’s disturbing opening claim: “It was now the year of the great hatred: the lives of Filipinos were cheaper than those of dogs” (p. 143). The narrative “twoness” – its dialogical balancing of American terrorism against American goodness – characterizes the writing beyond the achievement of mere polemics and stubbornly insists on the gap between real politic and sentiment, between idealization and realization that forms the central paradox of the American experience. When his companion Jose, chased by railroad detectives, suffers a ghastly accident, he is brought to a hospital, where “a kind doctor and two nurses assured us that they would do their best for him” (p. 147). These contradictions crystallize the text’s central questions: “Why was America so kind and yet so cruel? Was there no way to simplifying things in this continent so that suffering would be minimized? Was there no common denominator on which we could all meet?” (p. 147). The kindness sought in the ideal of a nurturing America as home, for the brown man, is always contested by the cruelty of violent acts that originate in terror of the other, a terror that spins off more terrorist acts. Through remembering both traumatizing and healing actions, *America is in the*

Heart obsessively repeats the psychological operations of ego and id as a story of the Filipino-American experience in the hands of an avenging majority white society.

In a more contemporary text, *Monkey Bridge*, the Vietnamese-born daughter Mai witnesses the operations of her mother's unconscious when she surreptitiously reads her mother's diary entries. The novel thus has a double narrator: both get to tell their stories – the mother through writing; the daughter, as narrator, through telling. But one survives and the other does not. What accounts for Mai's survival and her mother's suicide? How are their different ends related? As the successfully integrated immigrant, Mai finds her means of empowerment in the US, through her mastery of English and of American cultural ways. In contrast, the mother suffers a loss of her power, seen in the way she depends on Mai to explain to her the plot of her favorite television show, *Bionic Woman*. Mai's growing assimilation into US society is also related to her taking over her mother's powers, keeping her mother under her control by weakening and deceiving her, as seen in her deliberate (Cao, 1997: 38) mistranslation of the *Bionic Woman* scene, a deception that further confuses her mother on how US society works.

The novel engages with the representation of trauma as embodied phenomenon. While both mother and daughter suffer as refugees from dislocation, loss, and obsessive involuntary memories of war and violence, trauma is most manifested in the mother's physical and psychological symptoms. "Her body," we are told, "had become a battle-field" (p. 7). During physical therapy after her stroke, she is made to clap to help regain use of her paralyzed left hand (pp. 134–6). But in this "neurological crisis – when cross-wires between the right and the left sides of her brain were not completely functional – my mother had managed to hear the sound of one hand clapping."

Both Mai and her mother are afraid of sleep; Mai, fearful of dreams and nightmares, takes caffeine pills to remain hyper vigilant (p. 11), while the mother is an insomniac (p. 45) who stays awake all night writing diary entries in Vietnamese, which she destroys in the morning. The novel is structured chiefly through montage, a device that foregrounds the significance of flashbacks as analogous to the symptoms of trauma. The mother's secrets finally unravel to indict a Vietnamese-American identity that must encompass the Vietcong, imagined in the grandfather figure in the last third of the novel as demonically murderous rather than heroic. The daughter narrator sees herself through her mother's consciousness as "somebody volatile and unreliable, an outsider with inside information" (pp. 40–1); her very eagerness to discover the truths of the mother's Vietnamese past threatens the refugees' desire to "become anything we wanted to be in America," a desire that can only be grounded on the shaky mechanism of repressed memory, "the complete absence of identity, of history." The novel's tactics of remembering may thus be also seen as tactics of recovery from historical amnesia and trauma, and Mai's survival assured through her final understanding of the realities of her Vietnamese past.

In many ethnic American texts, the narrative is told through the perspective of the survivor who lives to tell the tale. In this way these stories share in that ironic questioning of Western enlightenment discourse that we find running through much of American literature, in Hawthorne's short stories and Melville's *Moby Dick*, for

example. Abel in *House Made of Dawn*, Cudjoe in *Philadelphia Fire*, Carlos in *America is in the Heart*. Ichiro in *No-No Boy*, the narrators in *Woman Warrior* and *China Men*, Mai in *Monkey Bridge*, are characters who speak in the conclusions to an American future. But their stories had chiefly narrated a story of a past, like Ishmael, of harrowing experience. The terror of evil – evil literalized and troped in the figure of Indian savages, insurgent black slaves, the yellow peril, or the great white whale – such evil as has to be compulsively, repetitiously, urgently exterminated, suggests the abrogation of individual agency to an authoritarian state, an Ahab, whose pursuit of evil and security places all the crew under threat of extinction. If today we read Ahab as figuring a captained nation, then the pursuit of whiteness may be said to have become itself the trajectory of terror to which the entire motley multicultural crew is lashed.⁶

NOTES

- 1 The events following September 11, 2001 resulting in the passing of the USA Patriot Act have influenced this critical reading of ethnic-identified American literature. More recent legislative actions to safeguard the nation against terrorism that have made it easier for the state to increase citizen surveillance, to deport non-citizens and citizens alike, to strip citizenship from Americans, to imprison suspected terrorists without habeas corpus, and so forth are not remote from literary imaginative productions. Arguably, the literature from communities historically traumatized by terrorist and/or state-sanctioned violence exhibits, thematizes, and aestheticizes these histories of feelings in their narrative content and in linguistic performance, including imagery and stylistics.
- 2 The actual symptoms used in the United States are described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or *DSM*. The most current version of the *DSM* is the fourth edition, text revision (*DSM-IV-TR*), published in June 2000 by the American Psychiatric Association (*DSM-IV-TR*: 2000). See also Cathy Caruth's path-breaking study on trauma and representation in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* and Kathleen McHugh's chapter "The Aesthetics of Wounding" for a more elaborate mapping of the intersections of medical symptoms and formal representations of narratives of trauma.
- 3 Tony Blair's passionate apologia to Europeans for the American war in Iraq takes precisely that rationale.
- 4 When Rep. Howard Cobb (R-NC) told a radio show that he believed that Roosevelt was justified in sending 120,000 people of Japanese descent to isolated camps in California and elsewhere – in part, he said, "for their own protection from potential hostile citizens . . . the National Asian Pacific American Legal consortium called on Cobb to step down as chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security" (Hook, 2003: A17).
- 5 No equivalent injustice on the scale of the Japanese-American internment has taken place in the US, post-September 11th. However, in response to the widely shared perceived need for greater security, Congress established a new Cabinet-level agency, the first new such body to be established in many years. The Department of Homeland Security began with a projected cost of 38 billion dollars. It consolidated 22 agencies and more than 177,000 employees. The first Homeland Security Secretary, Tom Ridge, was approved by the Senate on a unanimous vote of 94–0. Even another new anti-terrorism center based at the CIA to coordinate domestic and foreign intelligence from different agencies was also established ("Homeland Penny-Pinching," *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 2003: B14.)
- 6 New laws again lead to the loss of civil rights in response to perceived national security interests. For example we know that "Buried in the 340 pages of fine print that is the USA Patriot Act is Section 215 [which] allows FBI agents to demand from any bookstore or public library

its records of the books or tapes a customer has bought or borrowed." "The law bars booksellers and librarians from disclosing to anyone – their customers or Congress – that investigators came knocking" ("Book Snoopers' Open Door," *Los Angeles Times*, March 2, 2003: M4). Arguing that "It is vitally important that the government's intelligence and law enforce-

ment officials coordinate their efforts to protect America from foreign threats to national security," Ashcroft has been supported by the Supreme Court justices who "refused to allow the American Civil Liberties Union to appeal on behalf of Arab Americans and others who believe they may be secretly monitored" (Savage, 2003: A24).

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Feminisms and Literatures

Deborah S. Rosenfelt

Trying to write about feminism and literature, I recall how Virginia Woolf claimed to feel when asked to write about women and fiction: “women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems” (Woolf, 1957: 4). Unlike Woolf, who availed herself of “all the liberties and licenses of the novelist” in *A Room of One’s Own*, I had best begin in a more pedestrian way by defining my terms. “Feminisms” in this chapter refers to the wide range of practices and discourses in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, addressing and challenging social and symbolic differences and inequalities between women and men, and among women of different backgrounds and affiliations. I take it for granted that there are many feminisms, differently constructed by different social, political, and cultural constituencies, often overlapping, sometimes critical of each other. By “literatures,” I refer to multiple bodies of imaginative writing characterized by both generic and identitarian diversity, but linked in their participation in, indeed their constitution of, feminist discourse. Given the multiplicity of feminisms, genres, and identities shaping and inscribed in US literature in the second half of the twentieth century, I cannot attempt a coherent literary history or taxonomy. Even my categories for organizing this chapter are incommensurate with one another: I proceed neither by tendencies within feminism, nor by categories of identity, though I do sometimes draw on taxonomical labels like “socialist feminist” or “white middle class feminist.” Genre, theme, and chronology play a part in the organization of the chapter, but inconsistently. Nor can I offer any pretense of exhaustiveness. Rather, I offer glimpses of the cultural milieux in which feminist literatures circulated, and point to sites of writing over the last 40 years where women’s imaginative writing and feminist thought converge with particular force to theorize oppression, engage with struggles for liberation, and especially to negotiate the fields of difference and power. Inevitably, the sites I have selected are shaped by my own intellectual history and academic affiliations: early participation in the Modern Language Association’s Commission on the Status of Women; affiliation with the MLA’s Radical Caucus, with its emphasis on the politics of literature, the importance of pedagogy, and the practice of

an accessible materialist criticism; and deep involvement with the National Women's Studies Association in its formative years, when issues of difference, power, and privilege among women of different racial-ethnic backgrounds and between academics and activists figured prominently in all our deliberations.

I have constructed, necessarily, some arbitrary boundaries. I will look only at work by women writers, though feminism has also influenced and been developed by male writers, and though opposition to feminist writing/writers among some male writers (e.g., Norman Mailer on Kate Millett; Ishmael Reed on Alice Walker; Frank Chin on Maxine Hong Kingston) has generated some provocative if irate critique. I will focus primarily on work affiliated with and influenced by "second wave feminism," itself admittedly a contested term. In my view, women's imaginative literature and their writing and speaking about its production and meanings are one of the primary sites where second wave feminist thought in North America has been constituted. I will not make an argument about when second-wave feminism ends, nor when (or if) third-wave feminism begins, nor will I address efforts to deconstruct such periodizations entirely. I am less interested here in constructing genealogies of feminism *per se* than in reading its various traces and makings in American women's literatures.

Continuities, Disruptions, and Foreshadowings: Traditions of Protest and New Structures of Feeling

Feminist literary production in the United States has a long and complex history, extending back for decades or centuries, depending on when and where one enters the discussion. In the decades prior to the 1970s, there were several major tributaries to a feminist literary tradition. One was the work of women writers affiliated with or strongly influenced by the American left, who brought to their imaginative and critical work a sensibility influenced by though sometimes critical of American Marxism. As I have written elsewhere, these writers "unite a class consciousness and a feminist consciousness in their lives and creative work . . . are concerned with the material circumstances of people's lives . . . articulate the experiences and grievances of women and of other oppressed groups . . . and speak out of a defining commitment to social change" (Rosenfelt, 1995: 136). Among the white women writers whose writing lives bridge the "red decade" of the 1930s and the feminist 1970s–80s are Meridel Le Sueur, Tillie Olsen, Grace Paley, and Muriel Rukeyser. In their writing, their speaking, and their teaching, they paid and demanded attention simultaneously to the everyday often idiosyncratic details of women's lives and to the structures of inequality, the "circumstances," in Olsen's terms, that shape those lives. Profoundly different from one another in sensibility, style, and generic inclinations, their bodies of work cumulatively share a sense of the importance of history, of the social; a commitment to voicing what has been silenced; an awareness of class and race as well as gender; and a passion for social justice.

The legacies of this work for later feminist writing are pervasive. As Jan Heller Levi notes in her introduction to *A Muriel Rukeyser Reader*, two lines from Rukeyser's poems provide the titles of important anthologies of women's poetry published in the 1970s: Florence Howe's and Ellen Bass's *No More Masks!* ("No more masks! No more mythologies!" from "The Poem as Mask") and Louise Bernikow's *The World Split Open*. ("What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? / The world would split open," from "Kathe Kollwitz") (Bernikow, 1974: xviii). The work of Olsen, though a slimmer corpus than that of the others, was particularly influential in the women's writing movement of the 1970s and beyond. Both "I Stand Here Ironing" and "Tell Me a Riddle," from Olsen's collection *Tell Me a Riddle*, have been widely anthologized, as well as becoming the basis for independent films. Powerfully evoking working-class women's maternal labor and passionate too-often buried dreams for a more just world, Olsen's stories, essays, and talks touched and taught a younger generation of feminists. At the center of much of Olsen's work is the figure of the woman as artist, sometimes silenced or repressed, sometimes delirious in utterance, sometimes expending creative energies in nurturance, sometimes alienated from an increasingly consumerist society, but always seeing, knowing, recording with the eye if not with the pen, and always aware of what could be, if only society were structured less oppressively. Le Sueur, Paley, and Rukeyser share this broad social compass, though Le Sueur's emphasis in her later work becomes more mystical and ecological, and though Paley is the only one of the four who is consistently funny, mischievously instigating apparently lighthearted but often deeply serious encounters – understated moments of conflict and passion – between family members, friends, neighbors, and lovers, whose dialogues with one another compress worlds of emotional and political meaning between the lines. All of these writers would share Rukeyser's admiration for Ann Burlak, a labor organizer in the 1930s for the National Textile Workers' Union, in perhaps her best known poem:

She speaks to the greatest American women:
The anonymous farmer's wife, the anonymous clubbed picket,
the anonymous Negro woman who held off the guns . . .

(Rukeyser, 1994)

And like Rukeyser's Burlak, herself a figure for the committed artist, we might say of each:

She knows their faces, the impatient songs
Of passionate grief risen, the desperate music
poverty makes . . .
She knows
the songs.

(Rukeyser, 1994: 63)

A second tributary to second wave literary feminisms was the work of African-American women poets, playwrights, and novelists (some of whom were also left-affiliated),

prominent among them Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Childress, and Ann Petry. Based on a review of early 1970s' courses in women's studies and literature in my personal files, I would guess that Brooks's work circulated mainly among students of poetry, Childress's among students of theater. Hansberry and Petry, however, are ubiquitous. Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* (1959) offers in the figure of Lena Younger the representation of a strong and morally courageous black woman who could inspire her family to risk their lives by moving into a white neighborhood where they are not wanted. The central drama of the play, however, revolves around Walter, the son, who ultimately makes the difficult choice to forego his own ambitions rather than sell out to whites willing to pay to keep the family out. Adrienne Rich, writing about Hansberry in 1979, identifies her as "an early and lucid feminist" who identified De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as perhaps the most important work of the century. Rich goes on to speculate about the difference between Hansberry's "black feminist anger" and interest in lesbian sexuality as expressed in her essays, letters, and interviews, and their expression in the plays, which usually assign political rage to black men, and rarely interrogate heteronormative family life. She wonders about the impact on Hansberry's work of having to write for an audience with white middle-class, masculinist values and of the absence of a black feminist literary community. In short, Rich reads Hansberry through the lens of her own desires as a deeply political lesbian feminist writer. In so doing, she insists on affiliations that link Hansberry to contemporary feminism.

If Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* enacts at least a temporary victory over racism and poverty, an assertion of the power of human dignity over material circumstance, Ann Petry's novel *The Street* (1946) makes the obverse argument: that racism, sexism, and poverty inevitably and utterly destroy human life. Intervening in the traditions of naturalism by insisting on the importance of women's experiences, and clearly in dialogue with the work of Richard Wright, Petry's novel features the struggles of Lutie Johnson, a black single mother who ultimately cannot save herself and her son from the ruthless power of the street. Driving the narrative is a vision of relations of power in which poor black women constitute the lowest rung on the ladder of social status, and wealthy white men the highest: "In every direction, everywhere one turned, there was always the implacable figure of a white man blocking the way" (Petry, 1961: 195). So inaccessible is white masculinist power that when Lutie's frustrated rage at her own economic, gendered, and sexual exploitation and her inability to protect her son explodes at last, it is the black henchman, Boots, not the white club owner, Junto, whom she beats to death, sealing her own and Bub's fate. *The Street* gives voice and narrative significance to a working class black woman whose dreams of achievement and meaning succumb to the systemic interactions of patriarchy, capitalism, and racial inequality. Works such as these are important sites for inscribing and making apparent what in current feminist theory has come to be called "intersectionality": they remind contemporary feminist readers of the value of subjugated knowledges for a full understanding of "the American experience." They are sites of enunciation where, to respond to Spivak's famous question, the gendered subaltern is allowed to speak.

A third stream consists of the experimental poetry and fiction of middle-class white women writers like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. The two women, friends and rivals, have been designated “confessional” poets and “extremist” poets for the public uses they have made of extremes of personal experience: addiction, alcoholism, suicide attempts, tormented romantic relationships. While such designations are contested today, Plath in particular captured the imagination of a generation of younger readers as much for the drama of her life as for her art: her stormy marriage with the poet Ted Hughes; her vexed relationship with her mother; her attempts at suicide, ultimately successful; well-publicized struggles over her literary estate. Whatever reservations one might have over her adoption as icon by smart and troubled young white women, Plath’s poetry and fiction have made a significant contribution to American literature. The poems of *Ariel*, famously written in the early hours of the morning, combine stinging metaphors with a pared-down, wrenched syntax and often piston-like rhythms generating enormous power and intensity. They have been embraced as feminist in their rage, for example at the fascistic and brutal Father figure of “Daddy” and in the ironic representation of mindless patriarchy busily turning a woman into an assemblage of objectified parts in “The Applicant”: “Will you marry it, marry it, marry it?” (Plath, 2004: 12) Their feminism, however, is certainly profoundly different from that of the other writers discussed in this section, whose work evokes a sense of community, of history, of trajectories of resistance. The only other woman invoked in *Ariel* appears in “Lesbos,” as critic and antagonist; neither friendship nor community figure in Plath’s later poems. Still, Plath’s ability to recreate on the page her sense of isolation, of dissolution, of victimization and fury, has produced an unparalleled representation of a modern woman’s psyche in extremity. Not only is *Ariel* extraordinary as art, it has also helped those suffering from comparable psychic states to feel less alone.

The same is true of Plath’s novel *The Bell Jar* (1963), which manages to inject a note of sardonic humor and a certain self-awareness into the story of Esther Greenwood’s breakdown and recovery. Women and madness becomes one of the insistent themes of early second-wave feminism, often, as is at least partly true here, with the implication that society has driven the protagonist mad, and sometimes with the suggestion that her madness is in fact a measure of health and a form of resistance – not the case in *The Bell Jar*. Richard Ohmann, drawing on Raymond Williams’s notion of “structures of feeling,” argues that postwar fiction is characterized by a particular structure of feeling in which “social contradictions were easily displaced into images of personal illness” (Ohmann, 1984: 390). Looking at the fiction of Plath, among others, Ohmann identifies a narrative pattern in which illness, especially mental illness, becomes an alternative to accepting distorted social relations, including male supremacy. He suggests that the movement from illness to recovery is “the basic story” for novels of the era, and he argues convincingly that this pattern of feeling and narrative served the interests of the professional-managerial class of the 1950s and 60s. It is this process of recovery, of “adjustment,” that in my view makes *The Bell Jar* proto-feminist rather than feminist. Thirteen years later in Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), madness is re-written as a form of women’s resistance. Esther Greenwood, child of the 1950s, had

no cohort of allies from a better future, as does Piercy's protagonist, and engaged in no revolutionary gestures. Still, the work of Plath was mined by feminist readers – and writers – who found in it resonant representations of the angst of white middle-class women, akin to the “problem that had no name” analyzed famously in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in the same year (1963).

Dynamics of Change: Institutions and Personal-Social Narratives

Feminist literary scholars of a certain age may remember a series of sessions at the Modern Language Association's annual conventions in the early to mid-1970s. The MLA, already shaken in the late 1960s by the radical activism that had led to the insurgent presidency of Louis Kampf, had in 1969 established a Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession initially under Florence Howe's leadership. The Commission, together with the open-membership Women's Caucus, proved quite effective at monitoring the progress of its female members and challenging the masculinism of canons and curricula. At its forums and workshops for the MLA's annual conventions feminist critics and writers addressed large audiences, reflecting on the ways in which women writers had been silenced; the need for a revisionary criticism that could, as Adrienne Rich suggested, enter old texts from new directions; the reasons for the marginalization of women writers, the contours of new affiliations and traditions among women; the possibilities for a feminist poetics; and the relations of literature to social change. Many of these talks were published as essays in a range of venues, including traditional journals like *College English*; journals founded and edited by the writers/scholars/activists themselves, like *Conditions* and *Sinister Wisdom*, often edited by lesbian feminists, many of them women of color; and in the Female Studies series published by The Feminist Press, also co-founded and directed by Howe, and by KNOW, Inc., another feminist publisher.

The progressive political culture of those years was in part constituted by the speaking, writing, editing, organizing, and institution-building of feminist writers and literary scholar-activists. Let us look, for example, at the essays that emerged from three of the MLA's forums, at the ways in which they circulated, and at the concerns and changes they explicitly represented and implicitly foreshadowed. In December 1970, a forum and a series of workshops addressed women's status in the profession, the shape and purpose of an emerging feminist literary criticism, curricular and pedagogical issues and several pieces exemplifying new feminist approaches to reading texts. Published in the May 1971 issue of *College English*, these talks marked out territory for future debate, notably around the role of the feminist critic. Lillian Robinson, identifying as a Marxist feminist, explicitly rejected a criticism that would be simply another strategy for interpreting texts: “I am not terribly interested in whether feminism becomes a respectable part of academic criticism; I am very much concerned that feminist critics become a useful part of the women's movement.” She insisted that feminism itself is not about women's getting a “piece of the action” but about

“fundamentally transforming institutions” (Robinson, 1971: 889). As essays, several of these pieces also exemplified a writing strategy that would come to constitute a feminist genre: nonfiction prose using a personal and at times confessional woman’s voice and personal experience as representative of larger social issues and as a springboard for analyzing them.

At the Commission’s forum the following year, chaired by Elaine Hedges, two speakers made particularly effective use of this speaking and writing strategy, partly because they were able to mobilize their status as already recognized writers to imbue their personal experience as women who write with larger meaning. Again, these talks were published in *College English* (34 (1), 1972), but they have also circulated widely in many other venues in the following decades, including books by the writers themselves, reverberating far beyond the borders of the university. One of the talks was Tillie Olsen’s “Women Who Are Writers in Our Century: One Out of Twelve” (Olsen, 1972: 6–17), subsequently published as a chapter of *Silences*. Olsen spoke movingly and personally of the barriers to women’s creative expression – the caring for family members, the need to work for pay, the devaluation of women’s intellectual work. In her invocation of the divided consciousness and the multiple imperatives that characterize the lives of so many women artists, she articulated also a critical theme in women’s imaginative literature. Adrienne Rich’s “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision” argued unforgettably that “Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (Rich, 1972: 18).

Rich spoke too about the contradictions between the conservatism required in marriage and mothering and the freedom of mind, the subversive imagination, required to write poetry or fiction. She described the trajectory of her own work toward a moment when the “woman in the poem and the woman writing the poem” (p. 19) could become the same person, and saw the victimization and anger expressed by contemporary women poets, including herself, as necessary accompaniments to the exploration of a “whole new psychic geography” (p. 25) that contemporary women writers were beginning to explore.

Two decades later, in the foreword to her collection of essays, *Arts of the Possible* (2001), Rich reflects interestingly on the specificities of that historical moment and their connection with what I will call the personal social essay. (I also like Gloria Anzaldúa’s term in *This Bridge We Call Home*, the personal/collective autohistoria.) Recalling the then-fresh perception that women’s lives were mostly unrecorded and the pervasive and transforming conviction that the personal can be political, she writes:

Feminism has depended heavily on the concrete testimony of individual women, a testimony that was meant to accumulate toward *collective* understanding and practice . . . In “When We Dead Awaken” . . . I “used myself” to illustrate a woman writer’s journey, rather tentatively. In 1971 this still seemed a questionable, even illegitimate, approach, especially in a paper to be given at an academic convention.

(Rich, 2001: 2)

Rich goes on to note that in the increasingly profit-driven economy in which personal solutions have become part of marketing strategy and personal anecdote can preclude the discussion of ideas, a writing strategy that had been politically progressive in an era of “imaginative and intellectual ferment” when “many kinds of transformations seemed possible” instead could in the present moment feed marketing models of feminine self-improvement, devoid of political content. A different kind of language, she suggests, is necessary to a feminism that seeks to engage “race and colonialism, the global monoculture of United States corporate and military interests” (pp. 2–3).

In the mid-1970s, though, the personal social narrative as a feminist writing strategy, often growing out of talks for specific audiences at specific institutional sites, and often implicitly dialogic in nature as panelists engaged with one another’s work and with their audiences, was still laden with transformative power. In 1977, another MLA panel sponsored by the Women’s Commission and by the Gay Caucus featured talks by Mary Daly, Audre Lorde, Judith McDaniel, and Adrienne Rich. A transcript of the entire panel was published in *Sinister Wisdom* (6 (summer), 1998). Lorde’s talk, reprinted as “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action” in her widely read collection of essays, *Sister Outsider* (1984) freely “used,” in Rich’s sense, her identity as “a Black woman warrior poet” who is also a lesbian to inspire in her audiences the resistance to fear she herself exemplified. Narrating her experience with a cancer scare, the first encounter with the disease that would finally kill her, she came to understand, she says, the necessity for words, for speaking truth, whatever the consequences. “My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you” (Lorde, 1984): how many lines from contemporary nonfiction prose have served, as these lines have, as bumper stickers? Lorde’s essay, like Olsen’s, insisted that women writers and readers can and must redress the silences of the past. Like Rich’s early essays, collected in the aptly named *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (1979), it develops a feminist ethic of truth-telling in the face of social pressures to conform and to lie.

Rich’s talk for the same session eventually developed into her meditation, “Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia” (1975). This essay both invokes the personal — “I was born into a racist and patriarchal home” (Rich, 1975: 280) — and recognizes its inadequacy as a basis for addressing issues of systemic injustice like racism. The difficulty of the subject is signaled by an initial series of epigraphs, drawn from black and white women writers: Hurston, the Grimké’s, Lillian Smith, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Lorde, among others. Rich is concerned with the different histories of white and black women, and with the consequences of those differences for consciousness, including what she labels white solipsism. Knowing that these differences complicate and sometimes render impossible common projects based on patriarchal domination or on love between women, Rich gestures across the gulf of difference by trying to know as much as she can not just about but from black women, to read and honor their lives and words: a new motive for the scholarly apparatus of citations. One of the many works Rich cites as having influenced her is Barbara Smith’s now-classic essay, “Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” (1977). Smith, too, combined personal testimony with literary analysis, evoking her anguish at finding represented almost nowhere in literature or

criticism her own experience as a black lesbian. Her reading of Toni Morrison's *Sula* as a lesbian novel, or at least as a novel in which the profound connection between Sula and Nel is at least as significant as any relationship either has with the men in their lives, was precisely the kind of revisioning that Rich had called for. Smith's plea for more imaginative and critical writing at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality – "I want most of all for Black women and Black lesbians somehow not to be so alone" (Smith, 1977: 42) – was at least partially fulfilled in the ensuing decades.

Like the Modern Language Association's women's forums and panels, the National Women's Studies Association became a site for the production and the reception of feminist nonfiction prose, essays often emerging from particularly intense struggles over the meanings and implications of difference – racial, sexual, class, age, ability – and inequality among women. At a 1981 conference at the University of Connecticut focused on racism, an extraordinary session featured talks and readings by the authors of one of the most important anthologies in the cartography of feminisms and literatures, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), edited by Latinas Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. A collection of "cables, esoesses, conjurations and fusile missiles," as Toni Cade Bambara writes in the foreword, *This Bridge* explores identity and power from the perspectives of "radical women of color." Arguably one of the sites where the very term "women of color" acquired life and social meaning, through the processes of multicultural feminist organizing, writing, and collaborative editing, the book articulates repeatedly the commitments and complexities of identity. Moraga's essay "La Guerra" asks what it means to claim the identity of a woman of color when she is light-skinned and biracial, and to claim a Latina identity as a lesbian. Mitsuye Yamada writes about how her own identity as an Asian-American is something she has had to struggle for against not only social invisibility but also her own inclination to internalize stereotypes of the good, successful Japanese woman. Mirtha Quintinales muses in a letter to Barbara Smith, "Not all Third World women are 'women of color' . . . – if by this concept we mean exclusively 'non-white.' I am only one example" . . . and not all women of color are really Third World" (Moraga, 1981: 151). The form of the book inscribes this open-endedness about the meanings of the very terms used to create it, the terms which it helps to create. The pieces vary in length, in style, in genre: poetry, essay, letter, a series of bullets, an interview, a dialogue. The book is visibly the site of collaboration, meaning-making, and social struggle (not least with white feminists), a literary production that refuses in form and content to accommodate a separation between the personal voice and the public one, the individual identity and the political affiliation, though it also insists on complicating the meanings of all those terms.

"A Whole New Poetry Beginning Here"¹: Feminism, Poetry, and Politics

It is no accident that many of the writers cited in the previous section were not only essayists but also poets, for the feminist thought of the 1970s–1980s was in part

forged by the ideas and words of writers adept in multiple genres, and in mixed genres which combined poetry and prose. One such writer was Audre Lorde. Her argument in "Poetry Is Not a Luxury" (*Sister Outsider* 1977) in some ways looks back to Romantic notions of the poet as a kind of "unacknowledged legislator" of humankind, but it is also situated very specifically within a moment when poetry *did* form "the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action" (Lorde, 1984: 37). A number of critics and literary historians have analyzed the women's poetry movement as a rich cultural site both arguing for and illustrating the inseparability of culture and politics. One of the more controversial such discussions was poet Jan Clausen's essay, "A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism" (1982). Clausen claims that serious investigations of the evolution of contemporary feminism must account for the catalytic role of poets and poetry. "It might even be claimed, at the risk of some exaggeration," she writes, "that poets *are* the movement" (Clausen, 1982: 5). Unlike Lorde, she expresses an anxiety that poets have been given too much power, too great a burden of leadership, at the expense both of political analysis and poetic language; still, she does see the work of many women poets, poets of color in particular, as embracing a complexity of vision that runs counter to her own misgivings about the esthetic merit of a poetry that strives, in Marge Piercy's words, "to be of use."

Katie King (1994), T.V. Reed (2005), and, most extensively, Kim Whitehead (1996) have subsequently analyzed the contours of "the feminist poetry movement." Whitehead rejects Clausen's concerns as recuperating a formalist notion that politics and poetry cannot co-exist. These critics document not only the profusion and influence of women's poetry but also the remarkable proliferation of cultural institutions and practices that supported and disseminated it: little magazines, journals, small presses, feminist bookstores, poetry readings in countless venues, cultural festivals. King is interested in what she terms "feminist writing technologies," in this case story, song, and poem, and argues that the various apparatuses for feminist cultural production were the major locus for the evolution of a feminist politics of identity in the 1970s–1980s (King, 1994: 122). Reed sees feminist poetry as an elaboration of consciousness-raising, an inscription in linguistic and often performative mode of commitments to explore the relationship between personal and political. In her discussion of the works of Judy Grahn, June Jordan, Irena Klepfisz, Joy Harjo, and Minnie Bruce Pratt, Whitehead makes a case for certain crucial characteristics of feminist poetry, including its intertextuality (with cross-references to one another's work, one another's ideas), its range of experimentation with form and voice as it links lyric and narrative, and the emergence in it of a coalitional voice, one that blends individual subjectivity and collectivity, without eliding the differences among women.

Other critics describing the women's poetry of those years have identified a wide range of themes and concerns in their work. I offer some of their observations to suggest the scope of women's poetry since the 1960s, and the difficulty of generalizing about it. Marge Piercy, in the introduction to her anthology, *Early Ripening* (1987),

notes four features of the poetry she gathered: an “absence of ‘disassociation of sensibility,’ a fusion of the body, the brain, and the emotions; a confrontational aspect, renaming and recasting almost any “institution or holiday or habit or idea”; a “quest for the female godhead, the recreation or creation from scratch, from history and dream and vision, of a mythology and a cosmology that lead to us, instead of . . . sticking us in as an afterthought”; and a “rootedness in earth, in the powers of land and the connection with other living creatures,” which she associates with the influence of Native American poets in particular (Piercy, 1987: 1). Alicia Ostriker, like Piercy a poet as well as a critic, argues in 1986 that “one general point emerges” from an examination of contemporary women’s poetry:

The systematic gender-based polarities built into our culture are intolerable to many writers not only because they are perceived as oppressive to women and others, but because of intense yearnings for relationships defined by mutuality and interpenetration rather than by the culturally privileged grid of dominance and subordination, and because of powerfully rooted convictions that dualistic and hierarchical views of reality are falsifications. Mutuality, continuity, connection, identification, touch: this motif constitutes the imperative of intimacy in women’s writing, and in this motif we find the elements of a gynocentric erotics, metaphysics, poetics.

(Ostriker, 1986: 165–6)

Florence Howe, in her introduction to the second edition of *No More Masks!* (1993), the most comprehensive anthology of poetry by twentieth-century women writers in the US, distinguishes between two generations of poets whose writing overlaps in those years: an older generation including Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, June Jordan, Marge Piercy, Nellie Wong, and others; and a younger generation including Lorna Dee Cervantes, Judy Grahn, Irina Klepfisz, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Cherrie Moraga, Nikki Giovanni, Susan Griffin, Ntozake Shange, Joy Harjo, Rita Dove, and others. She gestures at overarching themes with her subtitles for each section, “The Will to Change” (a title from Rich) for the older generation, whose burgeoning feminism reveals in its expression deep ties to the liberation movements of the 1960s, and for the younger generation “Loving in the War Years” (a title from Moraga), whose poems often explore the many forms of love and sexuality across and within systems of oppression and in the face of violence. Howe ultimately focuses on two themes that she sees as crossing generations: the theme of the divided self and the quest for a wholeness of identity; and “the search for justice through the recognition (and elimination) of violence” (Howe and Bass, 1993: lii–liii). Hilda Raz and Carole Simmons Oles note that “[t]he female body and its major events – sexuality, menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, birth, illness, and death – provide a central metaphor” (2002: xiv) for the poems gathered in *A Fierce Brightness* (2002), a collection of twenty-five years of women’s poetry from the feminist literary journal *Calyx*, founded in 1976. Kathryn T. Flannery, identifying the poetry of the women’s movement from 1968–75 as a source of feminist thought related to but distinct from more explicitly polemic forms of writing like the manifesto, writes:

Feminist poems celebrated women's lives, critiqued heterosexist constrictions and misrepresentations, and imagined alternatives . . . Poems that long for men, poems that mourn the loss of an aborted child, poems that turn the tables and get their nasty revenge on male aggressors, poems that reveal a woman's weaknesses, that hold women accountable for their oppression, raunchy poems, silly poems, rabble-rousing poems – all find their way onto the pages of radical feminist publications. In individual poems, and more strikingly in the aggregate, poetry seems better able to hold dynamically together the complexity of human existence and to enact the interconnectedness of categories of identity than polemics, which must yield to the linear pressure of analytic clarity.

(Flannery, 2005: 110)

Among all the possible directions that a discussion of feminist poetry might take, I will focus here on the way in which it confronts intellectually and emotionally the specific histories and traumas of particular ethnic or sexual cultures, claiming them as part of a distinctive collective experience, while (often) simultaneously insisting on the necessity for thinking – carefully – across cultural boundaries. This is one of the ways in which feminist poetry speaks to issues of identity, difference, and power, one of the crucial theoretical matrices in the women's movement. To modify Ann Cvetkovic, this poetry becomes an archive of both feeling and thought, and it is that combination which made it so powerful for listeners and readers. Some of the poems of the era address this nexus of issues by exploring and legitimating anger, at racism, at the brutality of patriarchal power, at those oblivious to their own positions of privilege, including white feminists. Some examine the introjections of difference and power in the speaker's own psyche, the complexity of identities that sometimes produce what Cherrie Moraga calls "the breakdown of the bicultural mind" (Moraga, 1993: 138 ff). The poems I will examine here acknowledge the distinctiveness of the speakers' own identities, traditions, and losses, while incorporating imagery and deploying a syntax that raise, tentatively and sometimes only for a moment, the vision of connection across lines of difference. The possibilities for coalition or at least understanding proffered in each poem bear traces of the will to create what Chandra Mohanty much later calls a "feminism without borders," though the poems also reject any facile notions of sisterhood. Rather, they enact a process of both identification with and disidentification from the female other. I choose poems by Minnie Bruce Pratt, Irina Klepfisz, and Mitsuye Yamada, all poems of the late 1980s to early 1990s, and I think characteristic of that moment.

Yamada's "For Laura / Who Still Hears the Geese" (Yamada, 1988: 80–1) is addressed to a woman who has been a student in the speaker's writing class. A short retrospective narrative, the speaker remembers how she instructed Laura to show what she saw and what she heard, rather than telling in "worn words." The look on Laura's face reminds her of another woman's look, a Japanese woman who also mouthed clichés: "like hell on earth / like a horrible nightmare / like nothing you can imagine." The speaker then recalls Laura's words: "I couldn't hear the children / I couldn't hear their cries / because of the geese" (p. 80). So we learn that Laura as a concentration camp inmate has witnessed children being taken to the ovens, but hears only "the squawking geese sounds /

the beating wings sounds” made by the “geese the guards brought in” while they “marched / marched the children / into the ovens.” The speaker recalls ironically how she has been asking for precise diction, sharp new images, but intimates that some human experiences defy expression, and cannot be fully shared. The “acid shadows” of Hiroshima and the Holocaust, burned into the brains of the generation of Japanese and Jews who lived through them, cannot be translated into language, and no poet or teacher of poetry can overcome the inadequacy of words. Still, there is a recognition of the fragile commonality between the two women, the understanding that has been passed between them – “I will never forget your geese, Laura.” The reader, listening to this intimate monologue, will never forget Laura’s geese either, even while recognizing the impossibility of fully understanding the experiences of either Hiroshima or the Holocaust. There is a carefulness here, a respect for the pain and the dignity of “the other,” enacted in the moment of mutuality between the Japanese woman teacher and the presumably Jewish woman student, both sharing histories of trauma deeply though differently affecting their consciousness. Yet the poem concludes “I will never forget your geese, Laura / but still I cannot feel the bodies / of those children . . . that have left acid shadows / on your brain to burn and burn / I never can” (p. 81).

Klepfisz’s “East Jerusalem, 1987: *Bet Shalom* (House of Peace)” (Klepfisz, 1990: 237–40) is, like Yamada’s poem, a monologue to a specific hearer, in this case specified in the dedication as “a Palestinian woman who I am afraid to name.” Klepfisz explains in a brief prose preface that the poem refers to a meeting between a group of Jewish women writers, American and Israeli, and Palestinian women, who met to talk about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Again the tone is conversational, as the speaker recollects and incorporates the words and voice of the addressee. The poem enacts the difficult and painful dialogue between the women, moving from understanding (the need for safety, for control, what it means to have children who die, and children “who live and learn to be proud / of who they are”), to doubts about one another, about what each side leaves out in their accounts of their experiences (“the bus bombed the children in the schoolhouse”), to understanding again, invoked in a stanza in which it is sometimes impossible to tell to which group the language refers (“We remember the camps during and after / . . . bombings massacres / we understand the actions of a desperate people”), and to doubt again, and anger: “why are you our problem too?” The speaker remembers the Palestinian women’s telling them to write about the occupation, and recognizes that they are saying something about power: “Our voices carry. Yours alone does not.” Again, she draws on imagery that evokes the commonalities in the experiences of Jewish and Palestinian refugees, noting “the familiar / battered suitcases cartons with strings / stuffed pillowcases / . . . children running to keep up.” The final two stanzas abandon this spare style, as the speaker observes that “Always There is migration / on this restless planet . . . somewhere / someone is always telling someone else / to move on.” This observation about the universality of oppression only renews her own determination to remember and bear witness; she rewrites the language of the Bible to include Arabic place names and insist on the dual heritage of Jerusalem:

If I forget thee
 Oh Jerusalem Jerusalem Hebron
 Ramallah Nablus Qattana if I
 forget thee oh Jerusalem
 Oh Hebron may I forget
 my own past my pain
 the depth of my sorrows.

(Klepfisz, 1990: 240)

Klepfisz, who has written essays and poems about her experience as a Holocaust survivor, thus allies herself as a Jewish woman with the Palestinian woman to whom the poem is dedicated. The poem enacts a commitment, a promise to remember and bear witness to the suffering of the Palestinians under the occupation, and by implication a rejection of the Israeli policies that have turned them into refugees. The text recognizes in the gendered identities and cultural legacies and losses of the two women an ironic common ground, but simultaneously it testifies to the complexity and difficulty of working out an ethically acceptable stance within relations of difference, power, and privilege that preclude any facile notions of sisterhood between them.

In Minnie Bruce Pratt's "Seven Times Going, Seven Coming Back" (*Crime against Nature* 1990: 40–2) it is "my body" – the body of the poet-speaker – that is the "place of loss." The poem, published in a volume of explicitly lesbian poetry that won the prestigious Lamont Poetry Prize for 1989, is part of a sequence that mourns and rages at the unbearable loss of her sons to her husband's custody, because she chose to leave him and live as a lesbian. A series of two-line free verse couplets, the poem works through a set of complex juxtapositions, in which the poet compares herself with a tragic hero (perhaps Antigone) "who defied / her fate, who also said: *I choose death*"; to "a shell-shocked / woman in a photograph of war, dead baby / in her shawl"; and finally to a "dark woman" in a film who "sits locked in barracks, steel," reaching through locked gates of the factory for her children in the off-hours of a company job. Yet Pratt's strategy in the poem is not to compare for the sake of similarity, of identity, but rather for the sake of difference; she will *not* claim that all suffering is alike. In the earlier part of the poem she questions, "How serious is / the fate of one woman standing dazed, / alone by a wire fence . . . thinking of her children carried / away by their father as if captured"? No one, she observes, "tracked me with a helicopter" as she drives over the mountains to visit her children and back, crossing the Pigeon River seven times each way. She is different from the dark woman in the film at the poem's conclusion, forced to take work in conditions so deplorable that she can reach the heads of her children only "through an iron grill." And though she thinks about herself initially in terms of tragedy, she is different from the tragic hero because, unlike the hero of tragedy, she has a critical understanding of patriarchy: she knows "the father, and the law / over me." She refuses to accept that she deserves "judgments implacable as gods on my heart." If the tragic hero watches the light vanish while dying imprisoned in an underground cave, she is tempted but refuses to be buried alive in her body, "room of

shame,” rather insisting against the odds on her guiltlessness and her intention to take pleasure in her lover’s embrace.

Unlike the poems of Yamada and Klepfisz, this poem focuses on the grief and loss of the speaker herself. But like theirs, it develops a complex dialectic between identity and difference, acknowledging the common grief of mothers who lose their children, and who lose their lives defying the law of the father, while simultaneously refusing easy connotations among different women’s experiences, easy deployment of metaphors that represent her own pain by limning the pain of others. Other poems in the series do speak of the commonalities of lesbian women who lose or are threatened with losing their children, and the speaker sometimes derives a fragile and tenuous comfort from that sense of community, as well as the courage to rage aloud. Yet the negotiation of identity and difference in developing an ethical exercise of agency characterizes much of Pratt’s work, her essays (see *Rebellion*) as well as her poems. I see this negotiation as one of the most important legacies of feminist thought and cultural expression. The dialogic character of these poems, the ways in which they assume a deeply interested, engaged, and responsive readership, the way in which the reflections inscribed in poems are often worked through in related prose pieces outside of but resonating within the specific poetic text, exemplify and help to explain the affective and intellectual vitality of poetry as a site of feminist culture, thought, and practice.

(Re)writing History: Ad/dressing the Racial Wounds of the Body Politic

Fiction, too, manifests the mutuality of feminist art and feminist thought. Critical studies attending extensively to US feminist fiction explore, among many subjects, the way twentieth-century women’s literature writes beyond earlier narrative conventions requiring the female protagonist’s marriage or death (Duplessis), how the novel has inscribed the struggles of social movements and the processes of social change (Greene, Lauret), the affiliations and aesthetics of particular racial-ethnic traditions (Allen, Cheung, Christian, Saldívar-Hull, and Quintana, to name a few), representations of motherhood (Hansen), and women’s complex relations to the state (Brownley). Here, I explore a group of historical novels to suggest that women writers have not only entered old texts from new directions, but also reconstructed old histories. During the past 30 years, a number of important novels, many by women writers of color, have addressed the social histories, collective traumas, and political struggles of racial-ethnic minorities and the processes of colonization and de-colonization. Toni Morrison, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, speaks of this writing as “re-memory”; part of re-membling is to restore the stories of women to historical narrative. Morrison herself is one of the most distinguished and prolific contributors to this literature of reclaiming, re-visioning, and re-writing the past. Here I discuss with necessary brevity four important novels, two set in the United States, two set in “third world” locations, each re-membling a particular historical moment, each centering

the experiences and subjectivities of women: Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998), and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998).

Beloved has received, deservedly, a great deal of critical and pedagogical attention. It has been read for its transformative use of the real history of the escaped slave Margaret Garner, for its evocation of the ghostly power of the historical trauma of slavery and the need for both its re-memory and its exorcism, for the psychological complexity of its representation of mother–daughter relationships, for its extraordinary richness of language and its transformation of mythic and folkloric elements from African-American culture, and for its narrative inscription of the power and possibility for love and healing within the African-American community (see Andrews and McKay, 1999, a range of still-useful readings). Set in the post-Civil War era, the novel moves back and forth between 1873 in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the 1850s on the ironically-named Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky. It tells the intertwining stories of Sethe, an escaped slave now living in a literally-haunted house on the outskirts of town; of her daughter Denver, born during Sethe's escape from Sweet Home; and of Paul D., once a slave at Sweet Home, whose re-appearance at the haunted No. 124 initiates the novel's action. The text gradually reveals that Sethe has murdered her baby daughter to prevent her return to slavery. Scenes set in the past illuminate in excruciating detail the assortment of brutalities inherent in the institution of slavery and the evolving notions of scientific racism that legitimated it. In the present, Paul D. manages to evict the unseen ghost from 124, but the trio in the house soon confronts a strangely childlike young woman named Beloved, reminiscent of the "Dearly Beloved" Sethe has carved on her baby's gravestone. The haunted house now becomes a scene of seductions and rages as the childwoman Beloved entices Sethe into an obsessive and possessive maternal-filial relationship both deeply gratifying to Sethe and deeply destructive.

Ultimately, it is Denver who finds the strength to seek help from the larger community. A gathering of the town's black women exorcises the needy ghost, and Sethe and Paul D. are finally free to set their stories side by side. The novel ends with a sustained lyric poem, in which the figure of Beloved merges with the figures of all those slain in slavery and those who died in the Middle Passage, declaring that this is not a story to "pass on." That final phrase has been read as deliberately ambiguous: pass on can mean both to transmit and to reject. This, then, is a story and a history at once too monstrous to transmit and too momentous to let go. The novel thus poses a fundamental question: how do individuals and communities live with histories so traumatic and so consequential that they can be neither successfully repressed nor safely remembered? It is a question posed by other important women's writing of the second half of the twentieth century, among them the poems discussed above, as well as fiction from Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle* (1961) to Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), in both of which, as in *Beloved*, a repressed historical past bursts through the silences that have contained it and forces both protagonists and readers to a greater awareness of a historical legacy of great pain and great sacrifice.

Still, it is the legacy of slavery and “the color line” that perhaps most insistently has cast its shadow over American life, and it is that legacy that Morrison addresses in *Beloved*. She offers no easy answer to the dilemmas of coming to terms with that history. Yet *Beloved* is also, in addition to being a ghost story, a love story; and the text suggests that the forms of love – maternal, filial, communal, spiritual, and erotic – hardwon, and constantly reworked, can at least ease the impossible burdens of the past. Baby Suggs, Denver’s grandmother, preaches a spiritual love of self in all one’s imperfections. Finally, it is the complex texture of love among human beings – Denver’s for her sister and her mother, Sethe’s for her children, her husband, and ultimately Paul D., Paul D.’s for Sethe, and the community’s for one of its own in trouble that offers the possibility, if not for redemption, at least for an inhabitable body and a life in which grief can be borne.

Like *Beloved*, *Meridian* is a narrative of healing; as in another fine novel of the Civil Rights movement, Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* (1980), the protagonist must recover from the exhaustion and emotional pain of working in a movement in which lives are constantly in danger, in which political and personal differences become fused and confused, in which cross-racial friendships devolve into relations of distrust, and in which women are sometimes exploited sexually and often exploited emotionally. The Movement is represented as exhilarating and transforming, not just a struggle for, but a potential enactment of, a more equitable world, and simultaneously as a set of beliefs and practices increasingly difficult to sustain in a society that remains racist, sexist, and deeply riven by class differences.

Meridian is less well-known than Walker’s *The Color Purple*, but in my view it is at least as good a book, deftly incorporating in its structure and imagery not only a story of how the flow and ebb of a social movement affects the intersecting lives of its participants, but also a larger history that includes the legacies of slavery, the contradictions of higher education for young black women in the South, and the complicated relationships of African-Americans, Native Americans, and whites to one another and to the land. Most profoundly, it examines the contours of a racialized sexual politics within the contexts of the Movement, an interrogation appearing in compressed form in Walker’s brilliant short story, “Advancing Luna – and Ida B. Wells.” Its three central characters, Meridian, the protagonist and moral center of the book, the charismatic and self-absorbed artist Truman Held, and Lynn Rabinowitz, a Jewish civil rights worker who forms a troubled friendship with Meridian, move in and out of one another’s lives in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and New York over a period of two decades. Meridian, in love with Truman, has an abortion that leaves her infertile, just as Truman is leaving her for Lynn, whose esthetic admiration for black people he finds both suspect and inviting. Lynn, more and more marginalized in activist circles increasingly suspicious of whites, is raped by Tommy Odds, one of Truman’s Movement friends, a man embittered by the loss of part of his arm to the bullets of white supremacists. Lynn and Truman have a daughter, Camara, who is raped and killed in New York, where he is becoming a successful artist; both turn to Meridian for a comfort that she cannot deny but that exhausts her to give. The novel’s narrative structure is circular: it begins

and nearly ends with Meridian's participation in a small and seemingly trivial gesture of resistance as she organizes children in the post-Civil Rights South to demonstrate against their exclusion from a sideshow. Truman finds her there, helps her to heal from the mysterious paralysis that she and her family have always suffered from, and in the book's final passages assumes in her place the burden and the terror of resistance.

Walker's fiction here, and to some extent in her other novels as well, draws on the resources of both history and allegory. The contours of the novel trace key passages in Movement history: voter registration drives, the friendships and tensions between black and white civil rights workers, the multiple violences of white supremacy in all its variations, north and south; divisions of class, color, and politics within the black community; the tremendous importance of black churches; the "radicalization" of many Civil Rights activists in various forms of black separatism and in the revolutionary cells of the new left. Her characters are in certain ways iconic: Lynn, the white (Jewish) liberal from the north, unable to sort out guilt from love, vulnerable to exploitation, demanding in her emotional dependencies; Truman, the charismatic black male whose capacities for both leadership and art are too often compromised by his own narcissism; and Meridian, a black woman struggling to define and be true to her own emerging self in the context of an evolving struggle that demands from her a continuous but flexible responsibility to a larger black community. If iconic, though, they are also complex, three-dimensional human beings, who both enact and transcend racially and sexually scripted social dramas as they grow painfully into ethical personhood.

The first-person narrative of Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* works like testimonies from the survivors of the great atrocities of history, who resist the erasure of the past and speak in solidarity with the dead. Its protagonist, Amabelle Desir, has that identity, survivor, in common with Sethe. The novel is set along the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti during the brutal 1937 massacre of Haitian workers by the Trujillo regime. Amabelle is a young Haitian woman who has worked as a domestic in the Dominican Republic since her parents' death by drowning in the river that divides the two countries. The narrative of how she is forced back across the river into Haiti by the violence against her people reveals how the carefully articulated social locations of the characters – their nationality, their race, their gender, and their class – determine, along with inevitable accidents of chance, their fate in the massacre.

Amabelle serves as domestic servant and companion to Valencia, an upper-class young Dominican woman who marries Señor Pico, a once-poor Dominican of multi-racial descent who has risen to prominence in Trujillo's military. Her lover, Sebastian, labors in the Dominican cane fields, his face and palms scarred by the cane and the machetes used to cut it. Pico becomes an architect and executor of La Corte, the massacre and expulsion of the Haitians, who are identified in moments of doubt by their inability to pronounce with a Spanish accent the word "parsley." Sebastien disappears in the massacre, presumably dead. Amabelle escapes, though her face, body, and spirit are forever marked by having been beaten nearly to death in the process. *The Farming of*

Bones is a story of love and loss, of terrible wounding and slow and incomplete recovery, of escape and exile and brief return, and of confrontation with a past that continues to haunt and shape the present.

Unlike *Beloved* and *Meridian*, the novel shows little inclination to suggest possibilities for healing, and there is no reconciliation between the women of the novel across the gulf of race and class lines. Valencia and Amabelle share experiences of early loss; each in their girlhood turns to the other in the hope of friendship and nurturance. But their different historical locations militate against real friendship. Fundamentally decent but not strong, Valencia does what is expected of a woman of her class, marrying Pico and remaining loyal to him while wilfully blinding herself to the devastation which he helps to orchestrate, even when it touches those closest to her. Amabelle returns across the river to the Dominican Republic near the book's conclusion, and at first Valencia cannot even recognize this older wounded woman. There is a desperate sadness in their meeting, a reminder of the insurmountable barriers between them erected by class and history. Valencia tries to justify her life, telling Amabelle how she managed to save some people during La Corte: "I thought you'd been killed, so everything I did, I did in your name" (Danticat, 1998: 299). Amabelle finds their whole exchange "a lengthy meaningless greeting" between women who are neither strangers nor friends. "And at last," she says, "I wanted it to end." In the eyes of Valencia's servant Sylvie, whom she "borrowed from the slaughter" as a child, Amabelle reads a longing with which she is all too familiar, the longing for a modicum of the privilege that has protected Valencia and that all her years of "travail and duty" have not earned for her, the chance to live "an honestly gained life" (p. 306). Valencia's privilege depends, as we are reminded constantly throughout the book, on the labor of those who serve her. Her acts of genuine kindness weigh little in this context, nor do they balance the enormous historical transgression carried out by the man with whom she has aligned herself. "I would have had to leave this country if I'd forsaken my husband," she tells Amabelle near the novel's conclusion, failing to grasp that Amabelle has lost everything, everyone, both lover and country. At the novel's conclusion, Amabelle lies down in the river that marks the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the river in which so many have died. The river here suggests not the possibilities for renewal but the liminality of dispossession. Danticat offers no easy notions of sisterhood or alliance. In this text, gender itself is so deeply classed and so linked to national and racial identity that the impassable differences between women become a crucial subtext, the need for social change measured to some extent by the very width of the chasm. For contemporary feminists, Danticat's novel, like the poems of Yamada, Klepfisz, and Pratt, inscribes in its grief and rage the absolute necessity of taking into account the specific histories and historical memories of their protagonists and speakers.

Barbara Kingsolver has contributed prolifically to contemporary feminist literature, writing novels, stories, essays, and oral histories about gender relations, adult-child relationships, working-class women's labor struggles, environmental despoliation, and

the daily lives, unostentatious ethical commitments, and creative practices, social and esthetic, of women of many backgrounds. *The Poisonwood Bible*, her most ambitious novel, offers both a stinging critique of colonialism and a socialist feminist vision of engagement in the historical processes of change, enacted especially through the changing consciousness and eventually committed life in Angola of Leah, one of the novel's four missionary daughters. Kingsolver wrote the novel, she writes on her website, not because she spent a year in the Congo as a child, "But because as an adult I'm interested in cultural imperialism and post-colonial history." As I read the text, it also works through a central problem of contemporary "white western feminism," even while tracing a history that is distinctly not white and not totally determined by western intervention: how can a woman linked by birth to a history of oppression repudiate that history, and remake the national, racial, and class allegiances and affiliations apportioned to her by birth?

A fiercely evangelical and narrow-minded Baptist minister, Nathan Price, takes his wife and four children to the Congo for what is supposed to be a one-year mission. His rigid and ultimately deranged attempt to impose Christianity on the inhabitants of the village of Kilanga allegorizes a history of western imperialism. Ineradicably marked and changed by Africa, the four Price daughters and their mother enact in their experiences three decades of postcolonial encounter, modeling in their differences of character and fate different possibilities for western women's alliance with and estrangement from colonialisms, post-colonialisms, and liberation struggles. The youngest daughter, Ruth May, dies early when bitten by a green mamba placed in the chicken house by a resentful shaman; yet she remains a presence and a voice in the novel, and the emotional center for the mother, Orleanna, who cannot escape her grief and guilt over her daughter's death but who can learn to address her with hard-won understanding of the processes of historical change:

Are you still my own flesh and blood, my last-born, or are you now the flesh of Africa? How can I tell the difference when the two rivers run together so? . . . Look at your sisters now . . . they've got their own three ways to live with our history . . . Listen . . . To live is to change, to acquire the words of a story . . . In perfect stillness, frankly, I've found only sorrow.

(Kingsolver, 1998: 385)

Each of the other three sisters finds ways to live with their histories, narrating their stories in their distinctive voices. Adah, who suffers from a disability that causes her to limp and to think words backwards, ultimately becomes a researcher in tropical virology back in the United States. Rachel, the most rigid and selfish of the sisters, works her way through various men, always with an eye to securing her own status and financial well-being, finally turning her not inconsiderable talents for consumption into refurbishing and running the French Congo hotel she inherits from a third husband. The stratifications of race and class in Africa suit her fine. She caters to

foreign white businessmen in the hotel restaurant, while the black chauffeurs drink in a covered patio built “so they won’t be tempted to come in and hang about . . . in the main bar” (p. 462). The narrative of Leah, Rachel’s twin sister, like that of many other narratives in the tradition of radical fiction in the US, is a story of political awakening. Falling in love with Anatol Ngemba, a teacher, organizer, and disciple of Patrice Lumumba, murdered in “real life” in a CIA-backed operation, Leah gradually loses the naiveté that has informed her youth, her reflexive anti-communism, her reflexive Christianity. With Anatol, who is sometimes imprisoned and always in jeopardy from the anti-Lumumba forces under the West’s chosen successor, Mobutu, Leah describes herself as surviving on outrage. She records how the wealth of diamonds and cobalt are shipped out of the country to enrich a corrupt new elite and foreign buyers, while most of those in the country, now Zaire, starve. Eventually the family, now with four sons, moves to Angola to work on an agricultural project. “To be here without doing everything wrong requires a new agriculture, a new sort of planning, a new religion. I am the un-missionary . . . *Forgive me, Africa.*”

Like Leah, Kingsolver in *The Poisonwood Bible* is an un-missionary. The book is, in a sense, profoundly spiritual, not so much in its Biblical imagery and the rhythms of its prose as in its themes of guilt and ultimate redemption. But the spirituality bears no resemblance to Nathan Price’s Christianity. Leah is redeemed by her alliance, not only marital but ethical and political, with those who live by their own labor rather than profiting from the labor of others. The bodies of her sons, “the colors of silt, loam, dust, and clay” offer a redemptive promise “that time erases whiteness altogether” (p. 526). Leah’s maternal and productive labor speak to a utopian desire, manifest in much of Kingsolver’s work, for a communal form of work in which workers benefit directly from their efforts and labor itself is in harmony with the land and the environment rather than exploitive and consumptive.

One can read all these novels as quests for ways “to live with our history”: histories of inequality between classes, races, genders, and nations, histories of terrible brutalities which kill or deeply wound some and force those who are not its immediate victims either to assent or to resist. In a way, all offer, as does much of feminist fiction, “acquiring the words of a story” as one answer. But the stories they tell are different, and the differences matter. *The Farming of Bones*, for example, is stark and uncompromising in its re-membering of history, emphasizing the uncrossable distances among women and leaving indeterminate the possibilities for change. Ultimately, for Danticat, the suffering of the people of Haiti and the indifference or hostility of wealthier nations to Haitian poverty, is a transnational disgrace that cannot be resolved through the good intentions of well-meaning individuals, including western feminists. *The Poisonwood Bible*, a site not only of historical re-memory but also of western feminist theory, offers a utopian vision of possibility for a world in which conscious alliance and affiliation and conscious allegiance to progressive political struggle can be forged across the barriers of class, race, and nation, though the cost of colonialist histories must also be paid in blood.

Utopian Dreams, Dystopian Nightmares, Cyborg Fantasies, Vampire Desires

If feminist writers have reworked the materials of the past to inscribe the experiences of women into history, they have also contributed substantially to re-imagining the future. As many critics have noted, speculative fiction has been a site of exceptional productivity for late twentieth-century feminist writers. I use the term “speculative fiction” deliberately, to encompass both the more specific genre of science fiction, and to include a range of utopian and dystopian “fabulations,” to use Marleen Barr’s term, less akin generically to science fiction than to the speculative fantasies of Plato, Bacon, and More and of course to the work of earlier feminist inheritors like Gilman, in her eugenicist *Herland*. Jane Donawerth notes that the term “speculative fiction” came into circulation in the 1960s and 1970s “to suggest the fuzzy nature of the boundary between fantasy and science fiction, to recuperate the works of science fiction that were not part of the conservative space opera tradition, and to designate a body of New Wave science fiction that did not operate by the old rules” (Donawerth, 1997: xv, n. 3). She prefers to stay with the term “science fiction,” distinguishing it from fantasy. I prefer the more inclusive and less exact term, for I am concerned here not with generic parameters but with exploring the construction of speculative worlds as expressions of and interventions in feminist theory, variously inscribed in narrative.

Among the American women writers who have availed themselves of alternative times and spaces in speculative fiction to address feminist concerns about inequality and constructions of gender, race, and sexuality by imagining better or interestingly different worlds, by constructing frightening worlds through extrapolation and exaggeration of oppressive tendencies in the social present, and by exploring the ramifications of collisions between worlds and worldviews, are Margaret Atwood, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Octavia Butler, Suzette Haden Elgin, Sally M. Gearhart, Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Joanna Russ, and James T. Tiptree (Alice Sheldon). I would also argue that some works more often considered as realist, or viewed as historical novels, might be more fully understood if viewed as utopian in their inclinations and narrative impulses, including Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*. I will focus here on works by Piercy, Atwood, and Butler.

Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) is one of the most widely-used literary texts in feminist theory classes, and for good reason. Through narrating the struggles of Consuelo Ramos, a Mexican-American woman trying to survive in New York, and mourning the loss of her daughter to social welfare authorities, the book offers a profound and often moving critique of racism, patriarchal violence (both state-sponsored and domestic), class inequalities, masculinist language, health care access, masculinist bureaucratic rationalism, including processes of social and medical categorization, and hegemonic cultural production. Entering an alternative future world accompanied by her alter-ego Luciente, Connie (and the reader) have a series of encounters suggesting cumulatively a wide range of possibilities for more empowering

social, political, and economic arrangements. In imagining the details of the future-world of Mattapoisett Piercy lays out a program that is one of the fullest articulations of second-wave socialist/radical feminism. Perhaps most dramatically, she reconstructs reproduction and familial relations. She severs the link between biology and culture by circumventing women's connection to procreation. Children are born from a brooder which incubates fertilized ova of deliberately unknown parentage. They are parented by three adults of any gender, whose responsibilities for childrearing are independent of romantic attachments among the adults. Men can breastfeed if they choose; the sight of a man breastfeeding causes a shocked Connie to balk at this new world, but Luciente explains that since biological differences have been invoked as the basis for social privileges and injustices, they must be eradicated. Gender is similarly severed from sexuality; though gender is seen as fixed, sexuality is represented as mutable and desire as multi-directional.

Piercy's views of the institutions regulating and constructing ideas about mental health and mental illness remind us again of Ohmann's essay on the centrality of illness and the hospital in fiction of the mid-twentieth century, but rather than the "structure of feeling" in *The Bell Jar*, tentatively representing women's madness as an incipient social critique but assuming the necessity for accommodation as healing, in Piercy's novel madness becomes a grounds of feminist argument. Connie is not mad, but is labelled insane by a patriarchal and racist society blind to the worth of her dark female body and determined to use it for medical experimentation. Mattapoisett offers an alternative vision of madness as a kind of temporary aberration which requires sensitive individuals voluntarily to interrupt the course of their usual lives and take refuge in various supportive environments and healing practices. The resolution Piercy offers in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is not the healing of Connie Ramos, but her ultimate act of resistance, the murder of the doctors who represent the power structure. Consuelo's story, like many feminist narratives of the era, is one of political awakening, in which she learns from her future alter-ego Luciente to analyze her oppression as a poor brown woman, to trust her own capacities for mothering, for love, and for work. She becomes a guerilla fighter on behalf of a better future, joining a legion of such figures in American feminist fiction, including Kingsolver's Leah.

Like Piercy's novel, Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) has been widely-circulated and widely taught. Set in the near future, the elegantly-written novel, with famous prescience, envisages a coup which turns the United States into a rightwing fundamentalist theocracy, the Republic of Gilead. Environmental disasters have endangered the processes of reproduction, so women still able to reproduce are forced to bear children conceived during a public household ritual based on the biblical story of Rachel and her handmaid. Narrated by the Gileadean handmaid Offred (of Fred, one of Gilead's commanders), the text both sparkles with her bitter wit and mourns the terrible loss of her family and her freedom. Ultimately, assisted by a resistance that Atwood links to the Underground Railway, Offred attempts escape. In an ironic and mordantly funny epilogue, academics from a more-distant future endeavor to make sense of the tapes she has left behind, which, we realize retrospectively,

constitute the novel's first-person narrative. The preening, posturing, and masculinist jocularity at the conference on Gileadian studies at the conclusion suggest that little has changed in the world of academia; more important, the shock of displacement – Offred's voice, her intelligence, her subjectivity, her grief, reduced to an object for self-satisfied academic speculation – remind readers that there are many forms of women's, and human, oppression, not all as tangible as the brutal disciplinary strategies of the Red Room, the Aunts, and the Wall on which the bodies of the executed are exhibited.

The novel has been associated with that juncture in time during the Reagan era when a political backlash was inducing a complex malaise that has been dubbed, controversially, post-feminism. In my current view, however, *The Handmaid's Tale* is an entry into the feminist debates over sexuality, pornography, violence, and censorship so bitter and so widespread in the 1980s, and is aligned, like Piercy's novel, with a sexually liberatory socialist feminism. It is anti-feminist only insofar as it critiques a particular tendency within feminism sometimes labelled radical feminism, sometimes labelled cultural feminism. Offred's mother, shipped off to the colonies to die slowly of environmental poisoning, represents this tendency, most notably when she takes her young daughter to a bonfire where anti-porn feminists are burning books. The text suggests that there are ways in which radical feminism, in its wish to police desire and to censor all but the most socially legitimate representations of sexuality, has colluded with puritanical and repressive elements of the right.

Some critics have read the novel as blaming feminism for the neo-fascist excesses of Gilead. I see it as more nuanced, offering a critique of radical feminism that understands its longing for "freedom from" – freedom from masculinist violence, freedom from the excesses of the male gaze, freedom from the objectification of women's bodies – even while suggesting the necessity for "freedom to" – a liberatory vision of human sexuality and social relations fraught with risk and danger, inevitably misappropriated in the West by consumer capital, but necessary to genuine democracy. One could argue that the text offers a materialist feminist analysis of gender issues. Offred's painful economic dependence on Luke, her husband, after the confiscation of her credit card; the loss of her access to productive work; her reduction to the most blatant and exploitive form of reproductive labor all speak to the significance of work and money for social and human relations. In the world prior to the coup, unfettered capitalism has produced a dying environment – a ubiquitous theme in much speculative feminist fiction; and in both Gilead and its predecessor (the contemporary United States), the circulation of women's bodies and their representations constitute an important dimension of the economy, however underground in Gilead itself. This critique of a patriarchal capitalism located especially in and represented by the United States continues to address a set of concerns Atwood has previously addressed in works like *Surfacing* and *Bodily Harm*, the latter of which concludes, like *The Poisonwood Bible* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, with the transformation of an uninformed protagonist into a revolutionary.

One of the more powerful and ubiquitous images pervading second-wave feminist literature and theory is that of the cyborg. Donna Haraway's brilliant and influential 1985 essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," offers the earliest and still one of the fullest

articulations of cyborg politics; it insists on the embeddedness and relatedness of all modern humans within global circuits of production (economic, esthetic, intellectual) and power, and the interdependence of all of us with various technologies of knowledge. Famously concluding, “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess,” the essay rejects the notion that any group can claim innocence or Edenic purity, while insisting on the need to analyze material inequities shaped by global flows of capital and knowledge. Marge Piercy’s *He, She, and It* (1991) is openly indebted to Haraway’s work and in dialogue with it as well as with the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson. Like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Piercy’s novel takes place in a dystopian landscape – decaying cities, eroding deserts, the construction of fortified enclaves for the privileged – a landscape here explicitly disfigured by the depredations of corporate greed into a surrealistically hostile terrain. The landscape of *He, She, and It* is a common dystopian representation of what Pam Rosenthal has called the “bad new future,” “one of the few credible cultural representations of an otherwise undecipherable post-industrial world” (Rosenthal, 1991: 174). Piercy’s novel can be read fruitfully though only partially through Fredric Jameson’s analysis in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, in which he argues that “our . . . representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism” (Jameson, 1991: 37–8). Jameson sees in cyberpunk stories about “conspiracies . . . of interlocking and competing information agencies” a “privileged representational shorthand” that helps us grasp a more conceptually elusive network of power and control, what he names “the impossible totality of the contemporary world system” (pp. 37–8).

Piercy’s fictive world conforms in many ways to Jameson’s analysis. Huge multis – multinational corporations like the one for which the protagonist Shira initially works – have displaced nations as the locus of power and social order. Upper-echelon technologists living in domed enclaves keep the multis running, competitive, and as secure as possible from the incursions of infopirates. Most people inhabit the Glop – vast tracts of urban sprawl, where gang wars, drug use, and murders transpire amidst the endless city’s noxious fumes. The social geography of *He, She, and It* will be familiar to readers of Gibson’s *Neuromancer* trilogy, as will the processes of accessing the base through jacking in, the encounters with assassins in virtual reality, the threat of cybernetic burnout and death.

What distinguishes this novel and others like it, including those by Butler and Silko discussed below, from Jameson’s totalizing account and from Gibson’s bleak if energetic cyberpunk is the possibility of struggle and the promise of resistance and change, with liberatory figures coded as gendered and as particularized to specific ethnic or racial communities. Cumulatively, then, these texts both substantiate and interrogate the more totalizing theoretical analyses of commentators like Jameson as well as the disembodied masculinist worlds of cyberpunk sci fi. I read *He, She, and It* as a Jewish feminist reconstruction of the ahistorical and masculinist dimensions of postmodernist cultural production. Its two parallel tales, one set in the medieval past and one in the not-too-distant future, both feature a Jewish community besieged by hostile forces,

anti-Semitic in one instance, corporate in the other; and a gifted female protagonist who joins forces with a powerful nonhuman creature – the golem of Prague of medieval Jewish legend, and the cyborg Yod, designed by the brilliant scientist Avram as the perfect defender and modified by the equally brilliant Malkah to be the ideal lover – who ultimately saves the community. The text suggests that the postmodern moment is new in its particular configurations of money, power, and information, and in the possibilities for pleasure and danger inherent in the erasure of borders between human and machine. But it establishes a sense of historical continuity between present, past, and future, located in the experiences and perceptions of Jewish women. The refusal to relinquish a history of struggle is itself a utopian narrative gesture, in a sci fi genre in which the past typically has no textual presence. The free town of Tikvah (hope) offers the vision of a democracy of equals founded on ideals of community and mutual responsibility, though like Mattapoisett, not devoid of social struggle. Yod and the golem both must die to save the human communities of which they are a part; the cyborgs are expelled from the narrative in order to facilitate the survival of particular human groups. Piercy's vision, then, offers a humanist feminism that is perhaps less transgressive than Haraway's celebration of the post-humanist fusion of human and machine.

For a vision that embraces and sustains the mutual encounter of the human with the non-human, rewriting "the other" and both expanding and challenging feminist notions of "difference" while also preserving the sense of specific racialized historical legacies, one must turn to the work of Octavia Butler. Indeed, Haraway acknowledges Butler in "Manifesto for Cyborgs" as a source and inspiration, one of a number of "storytellers exploring what it means to be embodied in high-tech worlds. They are," she writes, "theorists for cyborgs," suggesting "a way out of the maze of dualisms by which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves," both "building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories" (Haraway, 1991: 31, 39). Butler's work is far too extensive and complex to be reduced to a singular dimension. She is the author of numerous short stories, as well as three series of novels, including the Patternmaster series of five novels, initiated in 1976; the Xenogenesis trilogy, now known as *Lilith's Brood*; and the Parable series, consisting of two novels; as well as the single novels *Kindred* (1979), her most popular work, and her final novel *Fledgling* (2005).

Like Piercy and Atwood, Butler links hierarchies of power and greed with the destruction of the earth in many of her novels. The landscape of her Parable novels projects a future for the West Coast similar to the barren, hierarchical Atlantic Seaboard of *He, She and It*. Cities burn and collapse; roving gangs kill arbitrarily for money and pleasure; the middle and upper classes take unsuccessful refuge in gated cities and protected enclaves in the hills. Like Piercy, Butler is deeply concerned with issues of ethnicity and difference. If Piercy's heroes in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She, and It* are, respectively, Latina and Jewish women, the majority of Butler's heroes are black females. Yet it seems to me that what Butler is doing with race, gender, and difference, especially in the Xenogenesis books and in her most recent novel, *Fledgling*, is quite different from Piercy's humanist project of reclaiming marginalized identities and giving them voice and narrative visibility. Butler dismantles race and gender by

playing deliberately and sometimes disturbingly with the possibilities for multiple forms of miscegenation and cross-species genetic tinkering, not to mention with various sexual and reproductive strategies that sometimes acknowledge the pleasures as well as the dangers of power and submission. Lilith, the Afro-American protagonist of *Dawn*, first novel in the Xenogenesis trilogy, must learn to overcome her repugnance toward the profoundly alien gene-trading Oankali, ultimately mating via a partnership with an ooloi, an Oankali who is neither male nor female but who gives sexual pleasure while altering genetic material. Her offspring represent multiple possibilities for remaking not only race and gender but human identity itself. Yet the Oankali are critiqued for their exploitation of Lilith and other humans, to whom they must learn to grant reproductive freedom. Issues of power, sexuality, and identity resonate in complex ways in the series; unlike Piercy, Butler does not offer the prospect of fully egalitarian relationships, but she does insist on the possibilities for self-knowledge about the inclination toward power, and on its ethical exercise.

This nexus of concerns remains important in Butler's more playful *Fledgling*, a recent vampire novel that suggests the continuity of certain feminist concerns over time. Its hero, Shori, is a young (well, 53-year-old) female vampire, who like Lilith's offspring has been genetically modified, in this case from the pale skin of traditional vampires to a deep brown – a mutation enabling her to function during the day. Shori's relatives, a male household and a female one, have all been murdered, as it turns out by other vampires who are deeply suspicious of genetic tinkering and who view Shori as less than vampire. The novel is far more than a sustained joke about the evils of prejudice toward "the other" and toward scientific innovation, though. It explores at length the symbiotic relationships among vampires and the humans on whom they feed, limning the profound interdependencies among lovers, among family members, and among species, and, like Piercy 30 years earlier in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, envisioning new forms of community and new forms of mutual sustenance. Unlike sexuality in Piercy's work, however, sexual pleasure and power are mutually implicated here; one might imagine a rather interesting encounter between the cyborg Yod, whose specialty is vanilla love-with-sex, and Shori, whose bite gives pleasure so profound that her symbionts become virtually addicted to her, though she needs and loves them with equal passion. In any case, Butler's work demands that feminists expand their visions of both difference and social change; she wants a multiculturalism, as Haraway writes in another context, "much messier, more dangerous, thicker, and more satisfying" (Haraway, 2004: 283) than the bland representations often proffered by consumer culture, and by some feminist writers as well.

Writing in the Borderlands: Globalization and Transnational Feminisms

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, American studies, women's studies, and literary/cultural studies have all been impelled by the same social, economic, and

cultural processes to “internationalize,” to think across borders, not just comparatively but relationally. Naming these processes by now has the ring of truism: the increasing flows of capital across national borders in the service of huge multinational corporations with weakened national loyalties; the rapid growth of new electronic technologies facilitating communication and collaboration in every area of geography and endeavor; the migrations of workers and refugees across national boundaries in search of work, sustenance, and security; the emergence of transnational movements and alliances ranging from religious fundamentalisms to feminisms and queer alliances; the multidirectional but not necessarily egalitarian flows of cultural production. There is little doubt that the embrace of a kind of transnational imaginary will, in retrospect, be identified as a hallmark of turn-of-the-millennium thinking in the humanities and social sciences in the United States.

Feminist literary and cultural theory in the American academy has contributed substantially to our understanding of these processes, of how they are gendered and raced, of how they reproduce old inequalities and produce new ones, and of the dangers and hopes they hold out for progressive social change (e.g. Grewal, Kaplan, Kaplan and Grewal, Mohanty, Shohat). The imaginative literature of US women writers has also been an important site for this effort to theorize globalization (to use a shorthand for these multiple processes), to speculate on its relation to the local and the regional, to examine its implications for the construction of identities and the formation of subjectivities, to explore its implications for social justice, and (sometimes) to envisage possibilities for liberatory change. If at one time, the term “regional” in relation to American women writers implied an embeddedness in the local, a recourse to topographies of familiar landscapes that also mirrored psychic geographies, and a constraint on the possibilities for geographic and structural movement, today the same term might imply the encompassing of a geopolitical and economic arena that extends beyond the boundaries of the United States; the clashes and cross-fertilizations of regional cultures and ethnicities not demarcated by national borders; and movements (physical and social), allegiances, and activisms shaped by the relational histories and current ties between the United States and the countries that have been replenishing and reshaping our population.

Not surprisingly these processes have been accompanied by an awareness of and attention to the importance of what Rich called, in 1984, “a politics of location.” She hoped that such a politics would acknowledge the differences among women’s bodies, histories, and ways of seeing, differences that included “the meaning of North America as a location which had . . . shaped my ways of seeing and my ideas of who and what was important, a location for which I was also responsible” (Rich, 1984: 220). Almost 15 years later, critic Susan Stanford Friedman in her book *Mappings* called for a “locational feminism” based on a “geographics” that figures identity in spatial terms, a “mapping of territories and boundaries . . . the axial intersections of different positionalities, and the spaces of dynamic encounter . . .” (Friedman, 1999: 19).

Since at least the mid-1980s, both women’s literature and feminist literary/cultural theory have been pervaded by evocations of geography and topography: borderlands,

diasporas, travels, and cartographies. This imagery signifies, both literally and figuratively, the complicated identities, alienations, affiliations, and allegiances of women as immigrants, as refugees, as political exiles, as citizens and sometimes as allies in reconfiguring regional interdependencies, crossing contemporary national boundaries. Much of the important literature by women writers in the United States today inscribes a profoundly diasporic subjectivity, a consciousness of displacement; of estrangement or tentative belonging in multiple locales, multiple worlds. The transnational and multicultural nature of this writing is reconstituting what we mean by “American” literature. To some extent, of course, “America” has always been a land of immigrants, and the literatures of “new” immigrants and their children have always flowed into and enriched the deltas of American cultural life. But the cumulative contributions of writers like Julia Alvarez, Gloria Anzaldúa, Leila Ahmed, Michelle Cliff, Sandra Cisneros, Edwidge Danticat, Gish Jen, Maxine Hong Kingston, Paule Marshall, Amy Tan, Bharati Mukherji, Esmerelda Santiago, Sara Sulieri, and many others who came themselves as immigrants or who were born into immigrant families with strong ties, economic and cultural, to various “old worlds,” redefine immigrant literature not as narratives of the integration and assimilation of protagonists, however painful and incomplete, into “American” life, but as narratives that explicitly remake what is meant by “American.” These works subject both old world and new to the critical examination that a sustained liminality enables, a liminality often experienced as painful but sometimes articulated and embraced as an enabling epistemological location.

Perhaps the single most influential articulation of a feminist “borderlands” subjectivity has been Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), a book that moves between English and Spanish, prose and poetry, theory and autobiography. Anzaldúa, like other Latino and Latina writers and theorists, reads the literal borderlands that lie between the United States and Mexico as a multivalent palimpsest for contemporary social and cultural relations between north and south, relations characterized by inequality and hardship but also by possibilities for movement and change. The relationship between the book’s linguistic and generic multiplicity and a reconfigured psychic terrain is worked out with special power in the frequently anthologized section of the book, “La Conciencia de la Mestiza,” in which Anzaldúa invokes her own multiple and sometimes contradictory identities to speak about the various borderlands that for her characterize contemporary experience: geographic, linguistic, sexual, economic, psychic, political. Remaking what has been a term of contempt, “mestizo,” or mixed-blood, Anzaldúa inscribes “mestiza” as a site of both pain and productivity. Her mestiza consciousness grows from division – between north and south; among Anglos, Latinos, indios; between lesbian/gay and straight; between rural and urban, professional and working class. Rejecting a politics or a way of knowing that depends on sustaining these dualisms, she remakes the figurative borderlands into a place of possibility and change even while invoking the literal borderland valley of the Rio Grande where poverty and race still mark the lives of its inhabitants.

The continuing currency of Anzaldúa’s essay owes something, I think, both to the way it speaks to contemporary tensions along the border and to the way it speaks

to the epistemological quandaries posed for feminists by post-modernist skepticism toward notions of a unified self, coherent and stable group identities, and narratives of progress. The essay is an invocation to the possibilities for political struggle deriving from the acknowledgment of multiple selves, or perhaps more accurately, multiple potential allegiances. It suggests that *mestiza* consciousness is simultaneously local and particular, and contributory to new formations of knowledge constructed in multiple encounters between people, especially women, of good will.

Mexican-American literature and cultural theory generally view the border as a locus for political struggle, and as a place where “American” identities are being visibly remade, infused by legacies simultaneously European, Hispanic, and Native American. The Indian, Asian-American, and African-American cultural warriors of Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, discussed more fully below, are inspired by a vision not unlike Anzaldúa’s. But borderlands identities and issues are not unique to the southern Tex-Mex border world. Caribbean-American women’s literature, like Chicana-authored work, offers a rich site for speculations about the political and personal meanings of borderlands identities. In Julia Alvarez’s *Yo*, for example, the protagonist travels back and forth between her native Dominican Republic and her home in New England; a handful of dirt given to her by the Dominican gardener signifies both the burden and the potential creativity inherent in her inescapable biculturalism.

Asian-American writers too have contributed extensively to this sustained reflection across borders and genres on the complexity of diasporic and borderlands identities and the difficulty and richness of possibility for both experience and expression. A decade earlier than Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, and like it a text that has circulated widely among feminist readers and teachers, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976) reverberates with the clash of cultures as they encounter and reconstitute one another. Like *Borderlands* too, the book crosses generic as well as geographic boundaries, in this case the boundary between memoir and fiction, both encompassed by the notion of “talk story” – a narration of familial and cultural history that can pivot between realism and mythmaking in a single sentence. Kingston’s text, composed of five related but independent stories, offers several incarnations of the figure of the woman warrior: most obviously, the mythic hero who conceals herself as a man and goes to battle, the words of her people’s oppression and struggle tattooed on her back; her mother, who does battle in China with ghosts and in the United States with racism; and “Maxine” herself, who struggles against familial and social silences, secrets, and sexism to find words adequate to the terror and beauty of her complex legacy. Texts like *The Woman Warrior* and *Borderlands* theorize what is now called “intersectionality” as a complex matrix of gender, race, class, national identity, and (for Anzaldúa) sexuality that constitute individual subjectivities and structure group identities and interactions. In both Anzaldúa’s and Kingston’s books, displacement and alienation become the basis for a hard-won transnationally or transculturally-derived knowledge. The closing figure in *The Woman Warrior* is the Chinese poet Ts’ai Yen, kidnapped by “barbarians,” who fights with them and listens to their strange music, played on reed pipes. Later, she is ransomed and returns to her own lands, where she composes what we are told is a

surviving poem, "Eighteen Stanzas for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." "It translated well," the novel concludes (Kingston, 1975: 243). The border-crossers in these books are simultaneously warrior women and artists, a figure who reappears in various forms in many feminist literary works, though Danticat's Amabelle offers a sobering counterpoint which reminds us that the historical realities of border-crossing can also be bloody and desperate rather than redemptive.

Among the fiction writers whose work explores in depth the ways in which globalization is gendered, racialized, geographically contingent, and economically driven are Paule Marshall, in *Daughters*, and Leslie Marmon Silko, in *Almanac of the Dead*, both published in 1991. Like Piercy's related *He, She, and It*, these are big, sometimes clumsy novels, epic in scope, encompassing vast tracts of space and time through shifts in point of view and chronological disruptions in narrative. In all these novels, resistance is coded as gendered, and women's actions as leaders or as family members are crucial. It is also particularized to specific racial or ethnic communities: Afro-Caribbean, American-Indian, and in Piercy's case, Jewish. I conclude here with a discussion of the novels of Marshall and Silko.

Marshall, born in 1929, has been producing important fiction since 1959, when she published *Brown Girl/Brownstones*. In 1983, her *Praisesong for the Widow* used mythic patterns to trace the return of a middle-class African-American widow to her Afro-Caribbean roots. *Daughters* is literally and substantively a larger novel, moving back and forth spatially and temporally between the continental US and the Caribbean, encompassing anti-colonial struggle in the Caribbean, the Civil Rights movement in the US, and the neocolonial relations that privilege a class of multinational capitalists and impoverish everyone else, especially the women and children in countries where structural adjustment has been the order of the day. The novel's two protagonists are a mother, Estelle, who has moved from the US to Triunion in the Caribbean to marry once-idealistic young politician, Primus McKenzie, and their daughter, Ursa, who moves back to the United States to study and work as a community organizer. Constituted by several apparently discontinuous plot sequences, and narrated from several points of view, including that of Primus's mistress, the novel gradually reveals the ways in which Primus is increasingly corrupted by multinational corporations interested in developing government lands and reaping the profits from tourism. Ultimately, mother and daughter, still loving Primus, collaborate in his electoral defeat, dismayed by his capitulation to the seductions of international capital and his betrayal of his poor, rural constituency. *Daughters* suggests both the depredations of globalized capitalism, and the possibilities for resisting it. The name of the radical young teacher whose victory Ursa secures is Beaufile, beautiful son; the text suggests a certain symbolic parallel between Ursa and Beaufile, and the figures of Congo Jane and Cudjoe Will, fighters against the colonial order of an earlier time – and the subjects of a thesis that Ursa's sexist and ethnocentric advisor has forbidden her to write.

The constant interchange in Marshall's work between Caribbean and East Coast United States implies a historically constructed regional imaginary. The United States is represented as the source for outflows of international capital that corrupt local

elites, and for the bodies of wealthy tourists who will contribute to the Caribbean economy while undermining its culture. Yet it is also represented as the locale of inspiration to black diasporic peoples who look to the Civil Rights movement as a critical chapter not just in American history but in the world history of oppressed people and their movements of resistance. Estelle chooses to raise Ursa in a way that will prepare her for “the barricades,” to acquire training, knowledge, and a community that will support her in a life of labor for progressive social change. Ursa’s work as a community organizer in the US, with all its attendant frustrations, parallels the work that the young Primus and Estelle undertake in Triunion, and it anticipates the gesture that will make Ursa an ally of those working for change in Triunion, even when the alliance means unseating her own father. Globalization, for Marshall, involves a recognition that ideas and social movements as well as economic capital move across national boundaries and constitute new regional configurations.

Leslie Marmon Silko’s previous novel, *Ceremony*, and most of her short fiction, center on the lives and struggles of Native Americans, often drawing on the healing patterns of Native American story ceremonies to structure and resolve narrative tensions. *Ceremony* is to some extent “regional” in the older sense of the term, evoking the particularities of Native American life in a terrain recognizable as the US southwest and drawing on the landscape for tropes of illness and healing. *Almanac of the Dead*, rather, is regional in the newer sense, set in a southwest in which the borders between Mexico and the United States have become largely irrelevant except for purposes of surveillance. It is a 750-page epic with a cast of hundreds, enacting the agonized decline of Euro-American civilization. The novel’s segments – the United States of America, Mexico, Africa, the Americas, The Fifth World – even in the progression of titles reworks geography into argument. The US and Mexico are reconfigured in a larger formation designated as The Americas, prefiguring a final utopian vision – a Fifth World – of ecowarriors and revolutionary Indians who join forces across the region, and with their colleagues in other parts of the globe, to resist Euro-American domination.

Silko provides us with a map at the beginning of the text, which diagrams the flows of money, arms, bodies, body parts, and drugs throughout the southwest and to other locales in the United States and Mexico. Tucson for her becomes a city not unlike but more nightmarish than the cosmopolitan global city envisioned by Saskia Sassen, a center of entrepreneurship, migrant destinations, multicultural interminglings, capitalist development, and criminal activity. Like the references to cartography in so much recent scholarship, Silko’s map, like the text itself, is a cartography of power, in which the southwestern landscape figures not so much as a region of the mind but as a graph for transfers of money and power and as a coded prophecy about sites of resistance. For Silko, globalization is not a new process, but rather the extension of forms of colonialism and imperialism that have continued on this continent for 500 years, leaving a legacy of violence and despoliation in their wake. The representation of women in *Almanac* is various; her women are as capable as her men of foolishness, selfishness, class exploitation, ruthlessness, and violence. But historical knowledge and an understanding of the implications of history for the future lie especially with

women: the Native American psychic Lecha; and Angelita, a Mayan revolutionary, in whose portrayal the novel represents a constructive, self-conscious activism.

What we see in such fiction, and in other work by contemporary feminists (the performance pieces of Coco Fusco, Anna Deverer Smith's *Twilight*, and the films of Celine Parrenas Shimizu come to mind), is the emergence of a specific form of feminist consciousness, a borderlands consciousness with a socioeconomic analysis, cosmopolitan, unromantic, gendered and raced but only questioningly allied to nation, uncertain about the location of home but infused nevertheless with a zeal for justice and a longing for social change. Such works serve as paradigms for and indeed as constituents of a revised American Studies and a revised Women's Studies. Ultimately these changes help us to read differently narratives of the past as well, so that we may unpack the ways in which the "old" regional was also an imaginary and the ways in which the earlier work of women too was implicated in the political and economic transactions – national and transnational – that have shaped the modern and postmodern worlds.

NOTES

- 1 Adrienne Rich, "Transcendental Etude," *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974–1977*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1978, p. 77.

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Blackness/Whiteness

James Smethurst

It has become common to regard race as a “construction,” an “invention,” or a sort of performance. Over the past two decades studies by such historians as David Roediger, Matthew Jacobson, Theodore Allen, Noel Ignatiev, Eric Lott, and Karen Brodtkin have investigated the complex political, social, and cultural processes by which various groups of immigrants to the United States became “white” through complicated, and sometimes contradictory performances of “whiteness” and “blackness,” constituting their class, racial, and national identities as “Americans.” At the same time much of the new scholarship on slavery in the United States has emphasized the binary relationship of racial classification in which black slavery stood in linked opposition to white freedom – with both categories enabling each other.

As a number of these scholars, especially Roediger in his many tributes to and citations of James Baldwin, point out, African-American authors have taken up the subject of the social processes and consequences of race formation for decades, centuries really. Not surprisingly, African-American writers have tended to emphasize the construction and claims of “blackness.” But from the very beginning, black authors commented on the structural relationship of “blackness” and “whiteness” as anchoring a linked series of paired opposites (Caucasian/Negro, European/African, human/brute, citizen/slave, reason/instinct, civilization/nature, and so on) that gave the anchoring pair social meaning. As many scholars have noted, a pillar of Enlightenment thought is the idea that Africans (and “Negroes” generally) are more or less the polar opposite of the moral, potentially enlightened human because of their alleged immunity to education and inability to produce “high” art. In much the same way that African-American slavery negatively defined what freedom was for white Europeans and North Americans, a supposed essential black cultural illiteracy delineated a trans-national literacy that separated Europeans and white North Americans from the colored peoples of the world. This literacy was both nationalist in that it separated great (European) nations from lesser or even non- (white) nations and trans-national in that it proposed a sort of cultural and moral universalism that was based on a kind of whiteness negatively defined by blackness.

Given the importance of the idea of the lack of an African or Negro capacity for literature and high art as a crucial building block of much late Enlightenment thinking, it is not surprising that Phillis Wheatley's existence as a poet should have caused so much debate, with some, like Voltaire (and, indeed John and Susanna Wheatley themselves) seeing her poetry as proof of Negroes as moral beings (and hence unfit for slavery) and others, like Thomas Jefferson, likening Wheatley and other black writers to parrots or mynah birds imitating human speech without real understanding. However, Wheatley did challenge Enlightenment notions of Africa as a sort of human zero merely by her existence, but also more directly in her poetry, as she does in "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth" when she suggests that she understands the "natural law" metaphors of tyranny and slavery used by the colonists in their struggle with the English crown precisely because of her slave status, race and continent of origin, not in spite of them. This understanding authorizes her to speak to the principal official of the English crown in North America. By calling into question the terms of "blackness" and "African" as posited by the Enlightenment, Wheatley's poetry challenges the construction of "whiteness" and "European."

A similar questioning of the terms of the opposed pair of black and white, resulting in the interrogation of the other linked pairs, takes place in Frederick Douglass's autobiographies, especially the first two, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). Douglass' narratives consist largely of several interrelated journeys, physical and spiritual, literal and symbolic. These journeys include the movement from the Eastern Shore of Maryland to New Bedford, Massachusetts, from slavery to freedom, from brute to man, from orality to literacy, from the margins to the mainstream, from common man to representative man, from mass man to individual, from a backward past to gleaming modernity. In this opposition of the common man to the representative man, Douglass does not claim narrative authority because he somehow embodies the common characteristics and aspirations of enslaved African-Americans, but rather because he is an average individual who, after the manner of the protagonists of such Christian allegories as *Pilgrim's Progress*, discovers the path to true selfhood and freedom. At the same time, Douglass goes out of his way to avoid being seen as exceptional. In other words, he is representative because he embodies the capacity of the average slave for self-development, again destabilizing the pairs of Negro and white, slave and master, brute and man, and so on.

Despite this long foreground, the notion of the constructedness and performativity of race was taken up with a new intensity by black writers in their various articulations of racial dualism with the fin de siècle triumph of Jim Crow segregation and the resulting social, political, legal, cultural, and spiritual split in both the body and soul of the black subject (adjudicated as both human and subhuman, citizen and demi-citizen) and the body politic of the nation. One of the most famous and most vivid renderings of this dualism is Paul Laurence Dunbar's metaphor of the mask in the rondeau "We Wear the Mask." One obvious aspect of the poem is how race is directly related to performance, given the metaphor's obvious allusion to the masking of minstrelsy and

the vaudeville stage. The many layers of this performance weirdly mirror each other in long, if not endless, regress. When a black (and blacked up) vaudeville performer like George Walker (of Walker and Williams), for example, adopts the longtime minstrel persona of the dandy, he is a black man assuming the role of a white man in the guise of black man attempting to unsuccessfully adopt the mask of upper-class white fashion and high culture diction.

W.E.B. Du Bois's 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk* famously elaborates this sense of dualism, particularly echoing Dunbar's open bitterness, but also suggesting that the split is a state that cannot and should not stand. His notion of individual double-consciousness had a metonymic relation to the development of a broad African-American self-consciousness that in turn was related to the location of African-Americans within American culture. Du Bois argues that, as Douglass and other partisans of Reconstruction feared, the sort of reconciliation between white southerners and northerners had taken place in a way that fundamentally excluded black people. When Du Bois speaks of "the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century" in "The Forethought" of *Souls*, and goes on to say in perhaps his most quoted statement that "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line," the white people of the north and the south have, in the main, embraced each other before the altar of Mammon (embodied most clearly in the New South city of Atlanta and the northern capital that animates the post-Reconstruction economy of the south), becoming simply white Americans. These now reunified white Americans are veiled from a resubjugated caste of African-Americans for whom the categories of "negro" and "American" are set at odds in such a way that threatens to tear them apart.

Obviously, many works of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly those that engaged and re-energized tropes of passing and the "mixed race" subject, took up the constructedness (and mutual dependency) of categories of black and white. The "light-skinned" protagonist Helga Crane of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928), for example, could be seen as racially perverse in the sense that she first embraces and then rejects the identity into which others attempt to push her. In the Tuskegee-like Naxos College at the beginning of the novel, she is perceived as too "Negro" as she consciously embraces a "tropical" love of bright colors. However, later when visiting her white Danish relatives in Copenhagen, she comes to reject such a fashion sense as those relatives and the rich bohemian Axel Olsen attempt to convert the mixed race college graduate from Chicago into an "African princess."

However, there is often still some sense in the Harlem Renaissance of the contradiction inherited from the fin de siècle era of Dunbar, Chesnutt, Du Bois, et al., in which the constructedness of race is balanced against what is seen as the hard to measure deep claims of race and blood. Langston Hughes's "Afro-American Fragment," for example, seems to acknowledge, or at least meditate on, the possibility of a residual racial and national heritage somehow transmitted through blood – although on closer inspection, as Jean Toomer's "Song of the Son" makes more explicit, these writers may be talking about the deep structures of culture, particularly of music.

This turn toward culture, and the notion of a common culture forged by a shared history rather than some sort of Herderian blood and soil connection becomes more pronounced by the late 1920s and early 1930s with the increasing influence of Franz Boas in the fields of anthropology and ethnography and the rise of the so-called “Black Belt” thesis in the Communist Left. While the Communist notion that African-Americans in the south constituted a “nationality” and in the north a “national minority” owed a great deal to older notions of the peasantry as the base of a nation and a national culture (that is, Herderian and Romantic linkings of nation to the soil), Communist theorists of the “national question,” such as Harry Haywood, critiqued biological models of race and racial difference, emphasizing instead a model of nationality rooted in a shared history and a shared culture. This became an important forerunner of the common formulation in our time that “race is a construction, but that doesn’t mean that it is not real.”

With the advent of the Popular Front in the 1930s, the linking of the “national question” to the southern soil became less pronounced. Instead, the focus of Left African-American literature during the late 1930s and the 1940s increasingly shifted to the working-class subject of the urban ghetto of the north and west: Harlem in Langston Hughes’s “Simple” stories and much of his poetry and in Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), the South Side of Chicago in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940), Gwendolyn Brooks’s *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), Theodore Ward’s *Big White Fog* (1938), and Frank Marshall Davis’ *47th Street Poems* (1948), and Detroit’s Paradise Valley and Black Bottom in Robert Hayden’s *Heart-Shape in the Dust* (1940).

The work associated with the Popular Front was also famously engaged with popular culture and the relatively new culture industries in new ways. These ways were generally less adversarial than the stances of both the high modernists and the Left writers of the 1920s and early 1930s. Drawing on popular culture forms, indeed creating high culture-popular culture hybrids as well as attempting to bring some sort of progressive consciousness to mass culture forms like pulp fiction, radio, film, and so on, these artists hoped to reach, and in some instances did reach, a mass audience.

However, this new engagement with popular culture was not only positive, but also involved an examination of the more sinister side of the ideological work of mass culture. In quite a few instances, Left black writers of the 1940s and 1950s anticipated later positings of whiteness as defined structurally against blackness, but instead of suggesting, for example, that it was black unfreedom and non-citizenship that defined white freedom and citizenship, they posed race and racial hierarchy in part as a human commodity price index. The sort of scale of beauty in which some idealized vision of “whiteness” stood at one pole and an equally stylized version of “blackness” at the other had long existed. And, obviously, the idea of human beings as commodities was not a novel idea for African-Americans. However, this new index fetishized conceptions of whiteness and blackness circulated largely through mass culture in which the poles of absolute value and non-value were connected to actual products in new, more intense ways.

Debates about popular culture and its effects had been going on for decades among black writers who confronted a popular culture saturated with representations of black bodies, voices, and culture. But, for example, Gwendolyn Brooks in her collections of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945) and *Annie Allen* (1949) and her novel *Maud*

Martha (1953) made a large, and largely new, contribution to the literary conversation about mass culture. These works helped introduce new registers to this conversation, registers in which the mixed voices of class, race and gender could be heard. While this might not seem remarkable to us now – coming after the interrogation of race and mass culture that arose during the 1960s and 1970s, the questioning of gender and mass culture that came into prominence during the 1970s and 1980s, and the considerations of race *and* gender (and class) by feminists (or womanists, if you prefer) of color during the 1980s and 1990s – it was quite astounding during the 1940s – so astounding that it was easy for many critics of the day to miss or misread.

As in the poems from *A Street in Bronzeville*, “kitchenette building” and the “The Sundays of Satin Legs Smith,” mass consumer culture, what the characters of *Maud Martha* consume, or wish to consume, largely defines their desires in a hierarchy of specular (and spectacular) consumption:

In the advertisement pages you saw where you could buy six Italian plates for eleven hundred dollars – you must hurry, for there was just one set; you saw where you could buy antique French bisque figurines (pale blue and gold) for – for – Her whole body became a hunger, she would pour over these pages.

(Brooks, 1987: 190)

In this scheme of things, not only did individual (and group) identity, depend on objects of consumption, but also people themselves became such objects. Obviously, such a transformation was literally dehumanizing for everybody, but it had a particularly destructive effect on African-American women, particularly poor, dark-skinned African-American women who lived in kitchenette apartments. In other words, in the same way that consumer goods have a hierarchy of relative desirability based on often arbitrary characteristics of size, shape, color and cost, so do human objects of consumption whose market value is clearly linked to power relations in the United States:

But I am certainly not what he would call pretty. Even with all this hair (which I have just assured him, in response to his question, is not “natural,” is not “good grade or anything like good grade) even with whatever I have that puts a dimple in his heart, even with these nice ears, I am still, definitely, not what he can call pretty if he remains true to what his idea of pretty has always been. Pretty would be a little cream-colored thing with curly hair. Or at the very lowest pretty would be a little curly-haired thing the color of cocoa with a lot of milk in it. Whereas, I am the color of cocoa straight, if you can be even that “kind” to me.

(Brooks, 1987: 195)

In such a market, everyone has to sell, make a pitch for her- or himself. In the case of Maude, since she is not white, not light, not curly-haired, not male, and not rich, her marketing strategy is to be good and “nice” in a stereotypical female manner.

The psychic cost of such a strategy is obviously enormous. One of the most obvious costs of defining your dreams in such a consumerist manner when your poverty,

your femininity, and your blackness put the goods you desire out of reach is that your dreams are endlessly deferred and eventually die:

She was becoming aware of an oddness in color and sound and smell about her, the color and sound of the kitchenette building. The color was gray, and the smell and sound had taken on a suggestion of the properties of color, and impressed one as gray, too. The sobbings, the frustrations, the small hates, the large and ugly hates, the little pushing-through love, the boredom, that came to her from behind those walls (some of them beaverboard) via speech and scream and sigh – all these were gray. And the smells of various types of sweat, and of bathing and bodily functions (the bathroom was always in use, someone was always in the bathroom) and of fresh or stale love-making, which rushed in thick fumes to your nostrils as you walked down the hall, or down the stairs – these were *gray*.

(Brooks, 1987: 206)

Contrary to Maud's husband Paul's consumerist fantasy about a "swanky apartment," the *Chicago Defender* "would never come here with cameras."

Despite this bleakness the final message is not entirely depressing. Toward the end of the book a new Maude begins to develop. The beginnings of this Maude may be dated to the birth of her first child about half way through the book as she moves farther away from the sort of consumerist scale of human value and toward some sort of new engagement with nature and a more natural self outside of the commodity system. Certainly, by the end of the chapter "the self solace," a fiercer, more active, more assertive Maude emerges. In a series of encounters with white people (a hat saleswoman, an employer, a department store Santa Claus), Maude refuses to defer, refuses to subscribe to a sense of herself as damaged or inferior goods. Tellingly, each of these encounters takes place in the context of the economic exchange of goods or labor. Finally, the book ends on a note of relative triumph as to the ability of the average African-American to endure or, to overcome.

Something of this consumerist vision of the mutual dependency of black and white is seen in Ralph Ellison's 1952 *Invisible Man*. This dependency is invoked in more existential manner in the famous "blackness of blackness" sermon in a hallucinatory section of the "Prologue" after the narrator has descended simultaneously into the music of Louis Armstrong, his subconscious, and history. The sermon is performed by an unseen preacher and answered by an unseen congregation:

"Black will make you . . ."

"Black . . ."

"or-black will un-make you."

"Ain't it the truth, Lawd."

(Ellison, 1952: 10)

It is not only unclear who is speaking, but it is also uncertain who "you" might be. As the book concludes, "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (p. 581) In other words, black makes and un-makes all Americans.

Similarly, in the episode at Liberty Paints, Ellison makes the simple but radical argument that the category of “white” rather than a neutral or a “natural” category is not possible without the category of black. It is at Liberty Paints that the narrator discovers that “optic white” paint, the whitest white paint, is made by adding black drops to a white base. That a black man, the paranoid Lucious Brockway (whose encounters over the years with racist white co-workers bears testimony to the saying “that just because you are paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you”), is the only one who actually knows how much black to add and what sort of pressure to put the black and the white under is a further irony.

Once again, however, the question of whether there is some deeper level of racial or national (in the Communist sense) identity is raised by the hallucinatory and horrifying “treatment” in the factory hospital that causes the narrator to descend into black folklore, into songs, into Br’er Rabbit, the dozens, and the figure of the trickster who “wanted freedom, not destruction” (p. 243). It is then, after he has been judged “unfit” for industrial work, that the narrator re-emerges back on the streets of Harlem where he meets and is taken in by Mary Rambo. Mary is not exactly a teacher of the narrator; she does not really have enough personality for that role. Rather she is a general personification of the African-American folk culture which will encourage the narrator, nourish him and shelter him. It is one of the central ironies of the book that the narrator has to come north and uptown to Harlem to go down home. This return to the folk is further emphasized when he unashamedly buys yams from a vendor on the street – something he would never have done down South at his Tuskegee-like college for fear of seeming too stereotypically black. The narrator declares, “I yam what I yam,” humorously affirming his black identity while recalling both Popeye and God in the book of Exodus in the Old Testament.

Ellison’s novel proposes a vision of American national genesis, not simply of Afro-America. There is an interesting moment in the Epilogue where the narrator encounters the northern white philanthropist Norton again – an earlier encounter with Norton ended with the narrator being expelled from college. Norton is unable to recognize the narrator, which is not surprising since Norton never really saw him in the first place. Norton asks the Invisible Man how he knows Norton’s name. The narrator answers, “But I’m your destiny, I made you. Why shouldn’t I know you?” Why, indeed? This raises the question of the degree to which race and icons of black and white make or unmake the canonical texts of the Jazz Age. For example, in *The Great Gatsby*, when Nick and Gatsby cross the Queensboro Bridge into New York City they are greeted by a sign of the disorder and possibility of modern urban life in America: two minstrel-esque black men and a black woman in a limousine driven by a white chauffeur. (“Black will make you or black will un-make you”.) In the end, though, the narrator circles around to the beginning, to the cellar or hole in which he has fallen out of history and which he has filled with light. However, it is not quite a circle in that he does not imagine racial/national experience/history inside, but instead can imagine the possibility of climbing out of his hole, out of black and white, as a radical individual subject able to do something – though what that thing might be is unspecified.

As David Roediger points out, the great literary thinker about race formation in the United States was undoubtedly James Baldwin (Roediger, 2005: 103–4). While the issue of race is raised in his novels, especially *Another Country* (1962), it is in Baldwin's essays that he speaks most directly of race as a historical construction and "whiteness" as a moral choice – a disabling choice at that:

But, obviously, I am speaking as an historical creation which has had to bitterly contest its history, to wrestle with it, and finally accept it in order bring myself out of it. My point of view certainly is formed by my history, and it is probable that only a creature despised by history finds history a questionable matter. On the other hand, people who imagine that history flatters them (as it does, indeed, since they wrote it) are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves, or the world.

(Baldwin, 1985: 411)

Not surprisingly given the powerful spiritual component that ran through the Black Arts movement, the notion of race being connected to some *volk* essence underwent a strong revival. Various attempts to posit and delineate some sort of black essence, or the "pumping black heart" as Amiri Baraka said in his play *Dutchman* (1964), became a powerful strain in Black Arts literature – though it is worth noting that the character Clay, in whose soliloquy the "pumping black heart" appeared, also suggested that the racially oppressed peoples of the world would not ultimately rise up until they became as "rational" and merciless as white Europeans and North Americans and "murdered" their oppressors. Many Black Arts poems and dramas, especially the more mythic or "ritualistic" plays invoked a fundamental difference between black and white, drawing, for example, on the Nation of Islam's story of Yacub, the black mad scientists who created the black monster, as Baraka did in the play *Black Mass* (1966).

However, the commodity/popular culture scale of racial value was also invoked and severely critiqued by Black Arts writers, much as they had been earlier by Brooks – in fact, one can see in this way that Brooks's famous "conversion to the Black Arts movement" at the second Fisk University Black Writers' Conference was a far shorter journey than has been sometimes allowed. In the high Black Arts poetry and plays of Baraka during the late 1960s and early 1970s, for instance, opposing images of Elizabeth Taylor and Ruby Dee are seen more often than battles between, say, Lester Maddox and Kwame Touré (Stokeley Carmichael). Similarly, both Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets in some of their most famous works like "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (1971) and "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution" (1970) posit a world in which pre-revolutionary black attitudes about beauty are shaped by a mass culture populated by demeaning black stereotypes and the superhuman figures of Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable.

Perhaps the most powerful Black Arts novel is Toni Morrison's 1971 *The Bluest Eye*, a novel that also looks back to the work by black women in the 1940s and 1950s, particularly Petry's *The Street* and Brooks's *Maud Martha*, as well as prefiguring the upsurge of work by African-American women novelists in the 1970s and 1980s.

In Morrison's novel, the black characters are crippled by this internalized commodity scale, what the narrator Claudia McTeer calls "*the thing*" that makes the light-skinned Maureen Peal "beautiful" and the darker-skinned characters not (p. 74). In point of fact, however, Maureen Peal is not "beautiful," but only relatively less "ugly" on the scale where an idealized whiteness is the measure of absolute beauty.

This "thing," this "enemy" of an idealized whiteness, causes the Breedlove family – Cholly, Pauline, Sammy and Pecola – to be totally alienated from the community in which they live, from each other and from their own natures:

Each member of the family in his own cell of consciousness,
each making his own patchwork quilt of reality – collecting
fragments of experience here, pieces of information there.
From the tiny impressions gleaned from one another,
they created a sense of belonging and tried to make do
with the way that they found each other.

(Morrison, 1971: 30)

The Breedloves share only one common conviction, a conviction which they communicate to the other African-Americans of their neighborhood: they are ugly. And, as Claudia McTeer notes, theirs is an ugliness which does not reside solely, or even primarily, in their physical appearance, but in the ferocity of the Breedlove's conviction of their own ugliness.

Essentially they got this way by internalizing various American myths (in the sense that Roland Barthes once used "myth" as a naturalization of hierarchies of power) of the self, notably a "feminine" myth of white beauty and a masculine myth of white freedom. (I should note here that by "feminine" and "masculine" I do not mean that these myths do not apply to some extent to both men and women – for example, Cholly and Sammy Breedlove also think they are ugly – only that they have certain gender associations in US literature and culture.) Both of these myths result in self-hatred, the destruction of community and the perversion of what are seen as natural or quasi-natural impulses, such as paternal and maternal love and sexuality.

Again, as in *Maud Martha*, this scale of the beautiful is inculcated by mass consumer culture, especially when rural transplant Pauline Breedlove, stuck in the free-enterprise, individualist loneliness of the industrial city of Lorain, Ohio, discovers the movies:

There in the dark her memory was refreshed, and she succumbed to earlier dreams. Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another – physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap. She forgot lust and simple caring for. She regarded love as possessive mating and romance as the goal of the spirit. It would be for her a well-spring from which she would draw the most destructive emotions, deceiving the lover and seeking to imprison the beloved, curtailing

freedom in every way. She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category of absolute beauty, and the scale was the one she absorbed in full from the silver screen.

(Morrison, 1971: 122)

In this scale she would rank her own face as zero. Since her face was not present in the scale, or was only present as a servant and/or comic foil to those marked truly beautiful, she must be ugly – and so must her family and so must her black neighbors. It is this conviction of ugliness that is transmitted to the Breedlove family, particularly Pecola whose name is taken from the 1934 film *Imitation of Life*, in which a very light-skinned African-American woman, Peola, played by Fredi Washington, rejects her dark-skinned mother, played by Louise Beavers, and passes as white. Typically, the transformation of the Peola into Pecola marks the inability of Pauline to imitate the life she sees in the movie just as her changed pronunciation of “chillum,” which becomes “childring,” marks both the abandonment of the language with which she grew up for a mythic standard in which she will never be able to attain proficiency.

It is important to note that this self-hatred is not limited to the Breedloves, but is common to all the African-American characters of the novel, including the boys who taunt Pecola, the light-skinned Maureen Peal, Geraldine and her son Junior, and Claudia and Frieda McTeer, who are constantly and ironically, if affectionately, compared to white movie actresses by their parents' boarder Mr. Henry and who learn to love (and hate) Shirley Temple as the ideal child. The difference between Pecola and the other black characters of the novel is basically a matter of degree. She, and the whole Breedlove family, become a sort of scapegoat for the black people of the neighborhood. But they are scapegoats whose slaughter does not release the community from its sins of ugliness and unworthiness because Pecola is a sort of mirror of her persecutors who condemn themselves as they condemn her. Their ugliness is the community's ugliness.

The myth of beauty acts in the service of power, justifying the social order, particularly in a society in which the mythic categories of black and white, as Theodore Allen, David Roediger and others would later argue, are crucial in defining individual social identity and in justifying social hierarchy. In other words, the myth did not simply just happen and it is not simply an accident of the supply and demand myth-making machinery of mass culture, but is what we might call motivated and, most importantly from Morrison's view, is quite consciously antagonistic to African-American empowerment.

Of course, all people in the United States, particularly women, are affected negatively by what Naomi Wolf famously called the beauty myth. Very few white women are going to be Hedy Lamar, Rita Hayworth, or Shirley Temple. After all, Rita Hayworth (née Margarita Carmen Cansino) was not really Rita Hayworth. And even Rita Hayworth, the Hollywood personality, was not the same as roles she played on the screen. As Hayworth notoriously remarked, “People go to bed with Gilda and wake up with me.” Certainly, the white people encountered in *The Bluest Eye* bear little resemblance

to the images that Pauline, Pecola, and the other black characters, for the most part, consume. Like Baldwin, Morrison suggests that white people pay a heavy price for their “whiteness” – though in the Black Arts spirit, that is not Morrison’s principal interest. Her chief concern is for black people, who are pointedly excluded from or distorted by the myths of beauty and freedom even as they are seduced by those myths.

The result is a sort of subservient individualism promoting envy of or contempt for one’s peers, self-hatred, violence against oneself and community as displacement of the rage against being judged ugly, and finally alienation from one’s natural self – particularly one’s sexuality. As we last see Pauline she is alienated from her husband, from her children, from her sexuality, disappearing like her husband and her daughter into her own world of keeping order and beauty as domestic worker for white people. Cholly rapes and impregnates his daughter and eventually dies in the workhouse. And, Pecola drifts off into her madness at the end of the book with her imaginary friend and her fantasy of blue eyes, reproducing in her own face an idealized image of Shirley Temple (who actually had brown eyes) on a cup.

Alice Walker, on the other hand, is one of the foremost artists linked to a more straightforwardly feminist critique of the Black Arts movement during the late 1970s and 1980s. I use feminist advisedly, of course, because Walker famously disassociated herself from much of what is sometimes referred to as “mainstream” feminism due to what she took to be that sort of feminism’s disinterest in the interests, issues, and even voices of black women – and sometimes blatant expressions of racism. Instead, Walker preferred the term “womanist,” which she distinguished from organized “white” feminism while claiming a tradition of African-American feminism often rooted in “folk” practices, say quilting, gardening, talk around a rural or small town southern kitchen table.

Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1983), both as novel and as film, was the focal point of extremely bitter debates within the African-American community – debates as likely (or more likely) to be conducted within the pages of the popular African-American press as in colleges classes and scholarly journals and forums. These debates – especially those carried on outside academia, for the most part – turned on the novel’s representation of African-American men, which the novel’s detractors argued was too negative and, at best, played into white stereotypes of black men or, at worst, was actually a disguised instrument of white social control of the black community.

Without replaying the debates in all their complexity, it is worth noting that there was at least one major strain of the Black Arts movement as negative in its representation of black men as Walker’s novel. This strain, influenced by the nationalism of Maulana Karenga’s Kawaïda philosophy and the Nation of Islam, envisioned the fall and degradation of Africa and Africans in gendered images of the black consumption of popular culture. Examples of this sort of Black Arts representation can be found in the poetry of Haki Madhubuti and of the Kawaïda-influenced writers group of Newark’s Black Community Development and Defense. One can see something of this attitude in Karenga’s condemnation of the blues in his influential 1968 essay “Black Cultural Nationalism” in which he condemn’s “the resignation of our fathers.”

The point here is not one of double standard, but that negative representations of men are not so much at the heart of negative reactions to *The Color Purple* as Walker's critique of the poetics, politics, and practice of Black Arts (and Black Power); hence the bitter nature of the debates. The novel challenges what is perceived as a Black Arts vision of a normative (and in the novel's view, patriarchal) heterosexual relationship as the ideal of a liberated black nation – whether rooted in some vision of African-American culture or some reconnection with traditional African values. In fact, turning the tables on cultural nationalists in a sense, the novel posits that such an ideal is actually rooted in slave-era white-supremacist ideology and the reproduction of the hierarchal opposed pairings of white and black, male and female, parent and child, that are passed down from generation to generation, much as domestic abuse generally is often perpetrated by those who were themselves abused. Again, somewhat like Maud, the ability of Celie and Shug, and ultimately Albert, Mary Agnes, Harpo, and Sofia, to break free lies in their natural capacity to love. Again, the worth of women is calculated on a commercial scale of value with its roots in slavery, which is seen as preceding the era of mechanical reproduction, of consumer culture. The almost pre-capitalist vision of black women as “the mule of the world,” to quote the crucial predecessor text of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is superseded by the utopian vision of what is essentially a society of artists and entrepreneurs.

Some critics have considered the novel's bifurcated epistolary form to be a flaw since Nettie's story is so much less developed and less compelling than Celie's. However, Nettie's voice functions as a sort of Greek chorus critiquing romantic neo-African traditionalism while recognizing the links created by slavery, the construction of race (and racism), and colonialism. It is designed to strengthen the anti-Black Arts model of identity and community in Celie's story as the novel moves toward its utopian ending. That community radically decenters the heterosexual, patriarchal, neo-Africanist ideal, imagining a new sort of African-American, even pan-African, unity here in the United States. This community, which includes Africans and African-Americans, college students and those with virtually no formal education, blues singers, farmers, entrepreneurs, textile designers, and so on, engages, perhaps with some irony, Black Arts' notions of black self-determination in which art and economic self-sufficiency intertwine. Not only does the notion of black unity and community remain, but so does the idea of a “good man,” who in Walker's novel emerges from the shell of a formerly oppressive self, as in the cases of Harpo and Albert. Interestingly, like the ending of Baraka's “Black Art,” this transformation is enabled by a capacity to love (a capacity that Albert's father, Old Mister, apparently lacks) – though perhaps on a more individual basis than in Baraka's poem since it is Albert's love for Shug and Harpo's for Sofia that separate them from Old Mister, who is color-struck, class-struck, and loveless – in short, caught up in mutually defining binaries of race, sexuality, and gender and apparently incapable of change.

Variations of the mutually dependent pairing of black and white linked by a scale or spectrum of worth and worthlessness based on some notion of property value or commodity exchange worth continued to exert much influence in subsequent literature by

black authors. In *Linden Hills* (1985), Gloria Naylor recasts Dante's (and Milton's) hell as an upscale black housing development. In this scheme Luther Nedeed/Lucifer is a black real estate developer. For this scheme to work, Nedeed must pose white people, particularly the white political and economic elite, as the God against whom he must rebel.

In short, perhaps because of the origins of US racial hierarchy in a labor system in which people were in fact property, black writers have long investigated the relationship between economics and race formation. They also were among the first and most profound critics of popular culture as a sort of mirror or public consciousness in which Americans fixed their identities, identities that they embraced, rebelled against, or strangely (and perhaps most often both). This criticism, issuing in many respects from the Popular Front, is one of the strands that ties many of the black writers of the Popular Front era to those of the high Cold War to those of Black Power and Black Arts to those of the post-Black Power/Black Arts era, suggesting a way in which we might be able to talk in different ways about the category of African-American literature.

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Borderlands: Ethnicity, Multiculturalism, and Hybridity

Ana Maria Manzananas and Jesús Benito Sánchez

I. From Frontier to Borderlands

The phrasing of the title of this chapter, with the colon separating borderlands from the three terms which are implicated in the concept, immediately points at a radical change in the way we conceptualize and think of borders. For one thing, the title suggests that the term is not univocal, but is traversed with notions of identity and process, with the exchanges and borrowings which take place across the line. As José David Saldívar explains, in the last two decades the terms border and borderlands have come to designate a revisionary dynamics (Saldívar, 1997: xii) which has challenged the received notion of the frontier, that major concept in American studies. It has been the field of Chicano studies that, as Amy Kaplan remarks, has begun to redress “the conceptual limits of the frontier, by displacing it with the site of the borderlands” (Kaplan, 1993: 16). The differences between the two terms are multifold, as Kaplan explains: Where the frontier implies a model of center and periphery, which confront one another most often in a one-way imposition of power, the borderlands are seen as multidimensional and transterritorial (p. 16). If the frontier in Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis” was imagined as a place of containment, invented to control, separate, and mark the process of civilization versus savagism, the multidirectional and hybrid quality of experience on the borderlands is characterized by its irreducible instability and heteroglossia (Saldívar 1997: xiii). As a mapping of social and cultural territory, the borderlands spring as a new stage of a revisionary process which started in the 1960s with the championing of ethnic identities, only to be later followed by optimistic multiculturalist policies designed to channel and in many ways control ethnic claims. By advocating a mestizo cultural space, the borderland paradigm disavows the rigid limits of nativist repossession and cultural authenticity. *Mestizaje*, or the hybridity which the borderlands has come to represent, highlights the inevitable negotiations and frictions which former nationalist movements like Aztlán, as much as contemporary multicultural policies, had tried to efface. In this sense, the borderlands

bring hybridity to the limits of the nation, and draw attention to the ongoing process of negotiation across the borders of race, gender, ethnicity, class, culture and nation.

The change from frontier to borderlands, therefore, marks more than a terminological shift, for it threads together the notions of hybridity, dialogue, and exchange across the border. It also points at the ineradicably hybrid nature of all cultures. If the frontier marked the imposition of civilization, borderlands revise and explore hegemony and power at the border, as well as the way they were imposed and naturalized. Instead of foregrounding the new product which emerges at the frontier, what Frederick Jackson Turner calls "the American," borderlands center on the vision of those upon whom manifest destiny is realized. In examining and addressing the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority, to borrow Homi Bhabha's words (Bhabha, 1994: 171), borderlands come as a compelling instantiation of postcolonial criticism in the US. The borderland paradigm thus draws attention to the issue of the creation of meanings across the multiple borders of a postmodern and postnationalist America. As in the postcolonial world, the analysis of the encounters and negotiations across these borders requires careful consideration of the dialectics between the discourses of power and the elusive poetics of alternative cultural practices.

Even if as "spatial historicity," to use Rosaura Sánchez's words, the border is construed, maintained and policed by state power, it also allows the presence of a "fuzzy area" which is capable of generating counter action (Sánchez 1998: 107; Harlow, 1994: 150). Borders are thus configured as most debatable and contested grounds; borders separate but also create contact zones which allow for interactions, sometimes abruptly, sometimes creatively, of cultures, languages and world-views. These in-between spaces can be the *locus* of exchange of values, meanings and priorities, but also of antagonism and conflicts. This is the double edge of the border, as Gómez-Peña has pointed out in his bicultural manifesto "The Border Is." This is also the indeterminacy which characterizes Mary Louise Pratt's vision of the contact zone. This reconceptualization of the border, from a thin line of political and historical imposition to a site of transgression and resistance characterized by instability is of paramount importance. For José David Saldívar the shift has helped introduce what he calls a new dynamic, a "new transnational literacy" in the US academy (Saldívar, 1997: xiii). This transnational perspective has also contributed to creating a theoretical and conceptual framework for rethinking US-American national and cultural spaces, as well as their connections and interactions both within the country as well as in relation to other literatures and cultures of the continent. As Paul Jay suggests, this revisionary paradigm has reformulated our approach to American literature within a multiculturalist and postcolonial perspective "by directing critical attention to the liminal margins and permeable border zones out of which cultures in the Americas have emerged" (Jay, 1997: 168). This decentering of the traditional *locus* of culture has been accompanied by a change in methodological terms which sees literatures, cultures and identities not as finished and self-contained projects isolated from other influences, but as constructs based on interaction and dialogue. Literary and critical borders, like physical boundaries, are therefore porous and

susceptible to being crossed. Criticizing from the borderlands, as Arlene A. Elder has suggested (Elder, 1996: 9), implies transgressing the vision of the border as a separating and dividing line to acknowledge the interrelationships of cultures, literatures, aesthetic theories and critical practices in the modern and post-modern world.

Originally an analytical tool for the study of the Mexican–American divide, borderland thinking can be placed in the context of changing discourses on cultures and the nation-state in the late twentieth century, where it appears frequently referred to as border theory. As Henry Giroux (1992: 26) and Paul Jay (1997: 174–5) have argued, the attempts by border critics to theorize the space “in between” have run parallel to postmodernist efforts at challenging, remapping and negotiating the boundaries of knowledge which claim the status of master narratives, as well as conventional discursive dichotomies (or divisive borders) such as essentialist/anti-essentialist or centralist/pluralist. Border theory has also challenged the tenets of traditional American studies not simply by incorporating new voices and critical terms to a long-established canon of literary figures and theoretical perspectives, but rather by delineating the literary and critical territory of the nation in radically new ways. The “America” of American Studies is no longer circumscribed to the US, but is rather seen in hemispheric terms, as the critical axis is displaced from the east–west to the north–south. American exceptionalism is displaced by the new attention to the cross-cultural conversation between national and foreign, inside and outside, center and margins, or to use Martí’s terms, between “our America” and the “other America which is not ours” (Saldívar, 1991: 17).

Though border theory can be said to be born in the 1980s, especially with the publication of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands La Frontera* in 1987, its genealogy can be traced back to nineteenth-century Cuban philosopher, poet and revolutionary José Martí and his critique of American economic and political imperialism. It is Martí that first envisions the possibility of the blurring of national identities in Latin America. Reminiscent of Emerson’s “The American Scholar,” Martí’s “Our America” is based on the principle of inclusiveness as it erases internal borders, and establishes *mestizaje* as the basis of its strength. And yet Martí’s optimism in declaring the independence of an indigenous Latin America does not prevent him from asserting the asymmetrical relationships of power across the Rio Grande. “Our America” stands in a sense as the barricade of ideas, to use Martí’s imagery, “to keep the giant with seven-league boots from passing” (Martí, 1991: 746). Martí becomes, in José David Saldívar’s assessment, a forerunner of later resisting intellectuals who, pen in hand, will continue a tradition of cultural resistance and affirmation among the dispossessed (p. 7).

II. From Américo Paredes to Gloria Anzaldúa

This tradition of oppositional thinking finds in Américo Paredes a unique and articulate representative in Chicano criticism. José David and Ramón Saldívar have very accurately portrayed Paredes as a “borderlands intellectual” who has effectively challenged

the process by which differences are naturalized and maintained. As historian and ethnographer, fiction writer and poet, Paredes has taught us that border culture cuts across disciplines and theoretical boundaries. Part of Paredes's great accomplishment is the fact that, as Renato Rosaldo has noted, he introduced "conflict, domination, and resistance rather than coherence and consensus" (quoted in José David Saldívar 1991: 56) in the reconstruction of border culture. The view of resistance as a distinguishing feature of Mexican-American culture and literature has been championed by Ramón Saldívar in *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, and is a key ideological axis in works such as José David Saldívar's *The Dialectics of Our America*. Much in the manner of Houston A. Baker in *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, as well as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *The Signifying Monkey* Ramón Saldívar has articulated a vernacular theory of Chicano literature based on the corrido and the kind of social, ideological and cultural resistance it represents. Saldívar appropriates Theodor Adorno's concept of negative dialectics to emphasize the perpetual negation at the border, the permanence of a dialectical confrontation which is never resolved. The importance of resistance as a defining feature of Chicano literature has been, in turn, challenged by critics such as Bruce-Novoa (1994), and more lately, by David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen (1997) since, they argue, resistance is another symptom of border making (Johnson and Michaelsen, 1997: 18). And yet resistance cannot be viewed just as a blind reaction, a specular – if negative – reflection of the colonizer. Rather, resistance brings under scrutiny the contending forces behind the annexation of Mexico's former lands, and reveals the realities behind official pronouncements. All Mexican nationals in the conquered borderland, as Ramón Saldívar argues, became an ethnic minority under the political control of the alien power of the United States (Saldívar, 1990: 17). The imposition of the frontier erected a parallel temporal line between the present, presumably civilized, Anglo, and expressed in English, and the past, allegedly savage and expressed in Spanish. But for the Mexican-American people, past and present coexisted in a dialectical relationship to create a bicultural heritage. Viewed in this light, resistance is just part of that dialectical stance or "in-between existence" which, as Paredes remarks (Paredes, 1993: 25), characterizes Mexican-American border culture from the very first days of the establishment of the Nuevo Santander settlement by Escandón in 1749.

The border story of racial and economic conflict was recorded on the Mexican-American side in the folk art form of the corrido, a cultural manifestation which conflated history and art. In his crucial study of the corrido *With His Pistol in His Hand* (1958), Paredes counters the work of modernist scholars of the 1930s and 1940s such as Prescott Webb, who had constructed an idealized vision of the frontier and its patrolers, and had established the common stereotypes of the Mexican as cruel, treacherous and degenerate. What the corrido does, in fact, is an overturning of hierarchies as it portrays the heroic quality of the Mexican-American hero – full of valor and courage as opposed to the weak Texas Ranger. And yet, even if the corrido as analyzed in Paredes's seminal work confirms the inefaceable line between Mexican-Americans and Anglo Texans, and expresses the multiple inner lines which disintegrated a presumably unified society, it also carries out a decisive exercise of hybridization; for hybridity,

as Homi Bhabha has described it, reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal so that other denied and suppressed knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse. In Paredes's study the corrido thus reflects and refracts received visions of the border and in so doing estranges the basis of its authority. Moreover, through the corrido as folk form Mexican-Americans enter the forbidden territory of history and intercalate their lines in between the American version.

Aztlán/Borderlands

As Paredes has expressed it, the borderer's disregard of political and artificial boundaries leads in a direct line to the Chicano movement and its mythic concept of Aztlán in "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" (1993: 30). At the First Chicano National Conference in Denver in 1969 the mythic location of the Aztecs became the touchstone of Chicano nationalism. In terms of space the plan drew the boundaries of a Mestizo nation within the boundaries of the United States. However imprecise its limits – made to coincide with the territories which were annexed by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo – the plan established a major boundary between the newly named Chicanos (cf. Anaya, 1989: 250), and the Gabachos, the foreign invaders; it also confirmed the liminal figure of the mestizo, and hence of racial contamination and crossing, as the citizen of Aztlán. In terms of time, the plan transcended temporal borders through a pre-Hispanic myth which predated both the Spanish and the Anglo-American colonization. If the plan delineated the boundaries of race and space within the United States, its revisionary agenda also redrew temporal lines within the linearity of US history, as it afforded Mexican-Americans precedence in the southwest (Arteaga, 1997: 12). The plan thus effected a reversal of traditional tenets of Anglo-America; it rendered Mexicans as not deportable since they inhabited their ancestral homeland.

As with Aztlán, the Puerto Rican cultural nationalists of the 1960s and 1970s turned to the image of Borinquen, a paradisiacal island romantically idealized, as a source of identity. For Puerto Rican immigrants in the mainland, Borinquen delineated a place outside the US geography that physically coincided with the contemporary Puerto Rico, and which had to be equally wrested from the hands of US imperialism. Borinquen was designed to map out a Puerto Rican space and time before the arrival of the *conquistadores*. It signaled the primordial moment of stability and full presence of Puerto Ricans, the originary moment of order before the fall into the chaos of (colonial) history. In Klor de Alva's words, Borinquen was "the repository of all cherished values, the wellspring of resistance, and the object of nostalgic remembrances" (Klor de Alva, 1998: 75). And yet the physical island encountered by the first generation migrants when they returned in the 1970s failed to match their romanticized expectations. Just as the borderland paradigm was to replace the nation of Aztlán with a notion of transcultural intellectual space, Nuyoricans (and other mainland Puerto Ricans) continued to find nurture in the idea of Borinquen once they transformed it into an inner space of the mind.

Although the nativist attempt to return to a golden age, as well as the establishment of an independent mestizo nation, does strike us – with the benefit of a dispassionate hindsight – as naive, Aztlán, like Borinquen, performed a decisive and far-reaching cultural and ideological work within and without the Chicano movement. The creation of Aztlán as a mestizo nation, existing in a relation of simultaneity and synchronicity with the United States, paved the way for Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and its emphasis on conceptualizing relations of difference across the line. A new possibility of ethnic affirmation, and a new player, the Chicano, emerged within the game of national identity, as Bruce-Novoa explains; this new presence problematized the historical process of nation building by introducing instability and hybridity (1994: 234). The creation of Aztlán can also be interpreted as a form of strategic essentialism fully inflected by the liberation movements of the 1960s; as such, it redrew the boundaries of an imagined community before those very lines could be redefined and contested, that is, before the mestizo nation could be transformed into Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness," or, to put it in Klor de Alva's words, before cultural nationalism moved from nation to notion (Klor de Alva, 1998: 75).

Tomás Rivera, Tierra

A year after the celebration of the Denver Conference, el Premio Quinto Sol came into existence as an attempt to create a literature, as the plan read, relative to the Chicano people. Tomás Rivera, with . . . y no se lo tragó la tierra, Rudolfo Anaya, with *Bless me, Ultima*, and Rolando Hinojosa, with *Estampas del Valle* were the first winners, and became, as they are commonly known, "the Chicano Big Three." In their works the narration of origins – as provided by Aztlán – becomes a narrative of process which explores multiple, kaleidoscopic forms of existence in between cultures. With their three distinctive voices, the writers continue Paredes's strategies designed, as José David Saldívar has put it, "to transgress rigidly 'border-patrolled' discursive boundaries" (Saldívar, 1997: 37). Written in the late 1960s, *Tierra* is an extraordinary document of the life of the migrant workers in the immediate post-World War II era. *Tierra* illustrates the process of border making, the inescapable line between workers and their exploiters; between the instant stereotyping of Mexicans as unreliable, violent, and treacherous, and the first intimation of the color line – as W.E.B. Du Bois would put it. At the same time the novel shows a parallel and simultaneous process of border dissolution. Thematically, a series of non-sequential vignettes and sketches dealing with absent sons who have been lost in action in Korea provides an example of the mobility of borders in a racialized society. But even if the characters in *Tierra* are crossed and demarcated by social, economic, and cultural lines, the stories and vignettes effect a powerful deconstruction of the ethics of good and evil, as Ramón Saldívar explains (Saldívar, 1990: 85). Chapters such as "A Silvery Night," and ". . . and the Earth Did not Devour Him" dissolve the existence and the belief in an unalterable world of presumably natural and legitimate powers, such as those of God, the devil and the boss,

as well as the system of values which perpetuates the difference between the haves and have nots, between the tellers of history and the objects of history.

In fact *Tierra* starts with a “lost year” to the unnamed protagonist, a discontinuous or migrant consciousness which has blurred the line between self and other. As the novel evolves, the reader finds out that this sense of loss is in fact made up of the “many things” the novel displays between the two framing narratives. Just as the lost year is “recovered” at the end of the novel, the lost history of the migrant workers, their oppression and resistance are also reinstated. The agency implicit in the discovery, the ability to “rediscover and piece things together” is analogous, as Juan Rodríguez has suggested, to the concrete creation of a piece of art, the novel itself (Rodríguez, 1986: 136); also, we would like to add, to the reconstruction of history from a decentered perspective. Rivera breaks down the assumptions of progress as implicit in a linear account; instead the writer places the metaphor of the instability of the migrant worker at the center of the narrative. This decentering is what the novel conveys and offers to the reader as raw material, without a center and without a unifying voice, until the unnamed narrator in “Under the House” embraces the heterogeneity of voices as part of his self, and as an integral part of his historical and ideological consciousness: “*I would like to see all of the people together. And then, if I had great big arms, I could embrace them all. I wish I could talk to all of them again, but all of them together*” (p. 151). This migrant and hybrid vision of the self is the newly discovered weapon of a protagonist who, unlike the heroes of the corrido, no longer needs to defend himself with a pistol in his hand. For him, as Bruce-Novoa explains, survival assumes a textual form: “The book itself is the praxis of the discovery” (Bruce-Novoa, 1990: 154).

Rudolfo Anaya, Bless Me, Ultima

In *Bless Me, Ultima*, the continuation of the community also relies on the protagonist’s apprenticeship as a writer. Like Rivera, Anaya forsakes the symbolic social force of the corrido and its celebration of direct, confrontational conflict to illustrate a series of possibilities of “in-betweenness” in the narration of a year in the life of Antonio, the 7-year-old protagonist. Situated in the midst of a contradictory and hybrid heritage, marked by the traditional opposition between the Marez and the Lunas, Antonio assumes the role of the mediator who, in a transculturating fashion, knows and discards from each culture what does not fit into an integrated mode of being. His role finds a spatial configuration in the bridge which, as a dividing line, separates but also communicates between Antonio’s house and the town. The bridge, moreover, brings a historical dimension into the novel as Lupito (a masculine diminutive for Guadalupe), war sick, is killed after shooting the sheriff. Interestingly Anaya does not allow the inevitability of history to devour the myths of the community. Rather, both the soul of Lupito – and with it the intervention of history – coexists in Antonio’s dreams with *la Llorona* as her companion, thus establishing a peculiar marriage of presumed contraries. But the destructive power of history has besieged the isolation of the house

from the start. As the novel opens Antonio's brothers are away fighting in World War II. When they return, they are "lost men" who have become alienated from the community. But the novel goes further back in time, to recall the first pioneers on the *llano* and the arrival of Anglo-American settlers, the *tejano*, and the building of his fences, the railroad and the roads. Situated at the end of this progress from fences to railroads, and as a dispossessed *llanero*, Antonio's father works in the construction of the highway, and in this way furthers the fissures through which linear history and western civilization infiltrate into the conquered territory. Implicit in this process is a parallel one of forgetfulness, of covering and obliterating the past. Not in vain, as Robert Lee has noted, Gabriel finds himself asphaltting the highway, the very earth/tierra on which his family once proudly herded. Just as the asphalt covers the earth, as Robert Lee remarks, the highway interns, burns and inhumes the old memories that lie under it (Lee, 1996: 328). It is at this juncture that Antonio's apprenticeship to Ultima becomes significant. Through the telling and the writing of a year in his life Antonio makes the textual bridge between opposites. He realizes that he can be both Marez and Luna, that he can choose the kind of priest he wants to be, that even if he cannot escape his past he can, in his father's words, "reform the old materials, make something new" (p. 236). This new culture, made up of the old and the new, will make the vertiginous pace of history compatible with the old memories, the thick layer of concrete of the highway and the "tierra" under it.

Rolando Hinojosa

Unlike the integrated vision Antonio conveys in *Bless Me, Ultima*, Hinojosa's *Klail City Death Trip* series does not give a view of the life on the border through the authorial omniscience, nor through the eyes of a presumably representative character (Broyles, 1985: 128). Rather, the vision of the community comes from the oral roots up, and from the inside out. José David Saldívar sees Hinojosa's writing as an attempt to "counter historical amnesia by restoring to the materiality of its signifiers the buried reality of south Texas history" (Saldívar, 1991: 67). This historical restoration comes as a conscious subversion of traditional Texas Rangers' stories. While the *rinches* worked towards securing a safely patrolled border, Hinojosa's characters traverse those borders on a daily basis, both physically and ideologically. The stories in the *Klail City Death Trip* series are not one but many, all interconnected. Each narrative crosses its own boundaries and, like the characters themselves, recurs in others, refusing self-containment. The formal borders of the novels, like those of fiction and history, the oral and the written, the Spanish and the English, are freely transgressed as the narratives engage in a constant intersection of different modes, styles and language varieties. Folklore, popular culture and, foremost, history, are all combined in Hinojosa's sketches.

History as a unifying frame is replaced by interwoven narratives which emerge from the community itself. Interestingly, Hinojosa distinguishes himself from the *mojados*,

those that cross the border as illegal immigrants, and considers himself an *empapado*, someone drenched or soaked with the border and its history (Hinojosa, 1985: 20). His stories, therefore, are not a distant representation of the border and its characters; nor are they stories of crossing from one state into a different one or of transgressing thin lines; rather, his stories are drenched with the border: they are and make the border. The *Klail City Death Trip* series thus produces a space of difference, an alternative or inter space in between dialectical forces which refuse to coalesce. Countering the efforts at policing national borders, and at enforcing cultural, linguistic, and even economic boundaries, Hinojosa produces a fluid literary space where all lines of demarcation are moveable. This space is literary, and represents the locus for the creation of a new ethnic identity, but is also physical, and finds in the V of the valley the ambivalent and ever-present drives of convergence and divergence.

Nuyoricans

A similarly unresolved conflict emerges in the poetry of Nuyorican writers of the 1960s and 1970s, whose works represent the Puerto Rican immigrants' struggle to resist both assimilation and exclusion. In expressing their difference from Puerto Rican and US cultures, Nuyoricans discover a something else, an "aquí" or inter-space, to use Bruce-Novoa's term, substantiated in a complex identity process which participates of the two cultural elements without fully becoming one or the other. The presence of conflicting forces in the adaptation of Puerto Rican immigrants to life (and death) in the *barrio* is dramatically portrayed in Pedro Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituary," where Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga, and Manuel "all died / dreaming about america." However, the poem conveys more than a heroic protest against the death of a culture; in the final stanza, the poem reverts to an undefined space called "aquí," a locus from which Puerto Ricans can initiate the construction of a national consciousness: "Aquí se habla Español all the time / Aquí you salute your flag first / Aquí there are no dial soap commercials / Aquí everybody smells good . . ." (ll. 303–6). Similarly, in Tato Laviera's "nuyorican," after expressing the disillusion at the Puerto Rico the migrants find when they return ("ahora regreso, con un corazón borícuca, y tú, / me desprecias, me miras mal, me atacas mi hablar"), the poetic voice of the migrant engages in a search for alternative spaces in which to recreate a homeland: "así que si tú no me quieres, pues yo tengo / un puerto rico sabrosísimo en que buscar refugio / en nueva york, y en muchos otros callejones / que honran tu presencia."

Far from being reduced to the strict limits of the *barrio*, the undefined space of the "aquí" becomes ubiquitous, not centered on notions of fixity and stability as much as on the process of crossing linguistic, cultural and geographic borders. The new home in New York is significantly made of *callejones* and streets, pointing out the fluid and ever-changing nature of Puerto Rican identity on the mainland. If Puerto Rico itself was already a de-centered and crossed culture (*una cultura atravesada*), marked by the presence of different colonial powers – and with the additional African

component – the Puerto Rican presence in the US has assumed border-crossing as central to its identity formation. “AmeRícan salutes all folklores, / european, indian, black, spanish, / and anything else compatible,” announces Tato Laviera in “AmeRícan.” In his comic vein, Laviera magnificently captures this ongoing crisscrossing of borders in his *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* (1979), a response to René Marqués’s *La carreta*, which naively encouraged a final return to the mythical island. In Laviera’s poetry, *la carreta* engages in a constant U-turn, as the Puerto Rico–US borders are recurrently crossed in both directions. The conflictual drives of convergence and divergence represented by Hinojosa through the “V” of his Valley emerge in Laviera’s poetry through the double motion of the “U,” with *la carreta* perpetually undoing its own progress.

Helena Maria Viramontes

A compelling illustration of the decentered, postmodern and urban border is found in Viramontes’s “The Cariboo Café.” The story has been qualified by José David Saldívar as an example of “border aesthetics” (Saldívar, 1997: 103) illustrating the multiple crossings and multilayered transitions that an undocumented migrant washerwoman undergoes as she moves from south to north (p. 99). The writer, as Sonia Saldívar-Hull points out, creates a pan-American feminism which makes an explicit connection between Chicanas and Central American refugees (Saldívar-Hull, 2000: 143). Viramontes taps into Rivera’s and Hinojosa’s dismantling of the border as a physical and discursive line to create a story of aesthetic and ideological crossings, but also of containment. For Sonia and Macky, the two children who get lost at the opening of the story, like for the illegal workers at the garment warehouse, and for the immigrant woman who takes Macky for her lost son, the café is a sanctuary against the “poli,” *la migra* in disguise. And yet the transgression of the official and political boundaries is systematically subdued and repressed within the orthodox ideology of the Cariboo Café, the urban border which repeats itself unexpectedly and chaotically. With the owner’s complicity the workers at the illegal garment warehouse who take refuge in the café become handcuffed enemies. Similarly, upon seeing the immigrant woman, the unnamed owner effects a paradigmatic mobilization of difference which is immediately translated as the imposition of inferiority. In Viramontes’s writing the border effects what can be termed “magical terrorism:” individual and elusive identities are homogenized into the fixed and changeless signifier of the illegal. Languages fall under a similar reduction: “I hear the lady saying something in Spanish. Right off I know she is illegal, which explains why she looks like a weirdo” (Viramontes, 1985: 70), the owner states. Spanish as a language is transformed into an illegal language; it is automatically de-historicized and ghettoized. And yet there are frustrated contact zones which the narrative never explores. In an indirect way, and like the immigrant mother, the unnamed owner has also lost his son in Vietnam as a result of US imperialistic practices. He is a grieving father, a male revision of *la Llorona*, “*el Llorón*” who, like the woman, takes an immediate liking to the little boy, Macky.

This is finally the double crossing the story illustrates. The woman who had escaped the violence of Central America is caught in the violence of the repeating, urban and sexualized border which is manifested with new versions of bars, “guns taut and cold like steel erections.” Lines in “The Cariboo Café” may mark the articulation of communal bonds; but they are also traversed by the ineradicable trappings of power which await on the other side. The violence of the border in “The Cariboo Café” further actualizes other instances of brutality such as the repressive regimes of Central America (which have tortured and murdered the washer woman’s child), as well as the carnage of colonial times, as in *Under the Feet of Jesus*. In this disorienting border narrative there are no stable references, no spatial or time borders, and like the characters, the reader loses her/his bearings and cannot remember whether s/he is in Central America or in a big US-American city. Central America, that is, the politically repressed parts of the continent, is set up side by side with presumably liberal, democratic and civilized North America. The vision of the United States as the unlimited Garden of Eden is hybridized with a vision of repressive practices which make the country similar to those other parts of the continent the US barricades itself against. Consequently, the limits of nation the US tries so hard to protect suddenly dissolve in this nonsynchronous vision.

Gloria Anzaldúa

The challenge of the internal and external borders of the nation returns to Chicano criticism with unprecedented eloquence since Paredes’s scholarship with Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa transforms the narrative of origins as fleshed out in Aztlán into a narrative of process which reconceptualizes Chicano space and identity. As we noted before, Anzaldúa moves from nation to notion; from a nation which requires physical limits, to a mestiza consciousness which situates hybridity at the center of its very formulation. *Mestizaje* determines the form and the language of the project itself. *Borderlands* is a postmodernist mixture of autobiography, historical document, and poetry collection which resists generic, linguistic, as well as geopolitical borders. From the title itself *Borderlands/La Frontera* speaks with an assailable double voice. Anzaldúa’s reconceptualization of “la frontera” as “una herida abierta,” contrasts with Turner’s vision of the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” If for Turner “the wilderness masters the colonist” and “strips off the garments of civilization” to make the new product, the American, Anzaldúa offers the account of those who are crossed by the frontier and suffer its imposition, “los atravesados”: “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead” (p. 3). Anzaldúa’s term, as Saldívar-Hull remarks, captures the intersection of languages and world visions at the border (2000: 67); it also evokes the continuous exercise of resistance and transgression at the border. If the plan separated the presumably ethnically and culturally pure from the other (the gringo, the acculturated or assimilated) *Borderlands* breaks up the line to explore the multiple

intercultural possibilities between these two options. *Borderlands*, precisely, addresses the issue of being in between cultures constantly crossing from one to the other which was first pointed out by Paredes. The border as a dividing line thus opens to the borderlands, those vague and undetermined spaces or contact zones which create, to use Paul Jay's words, "a fluid and improvisational space in which languages and identities hybridize and evolve" (Jay, 1997: 173). Against the thin ideological lines of Aztlán, Anzaldúa articulates a broader area of greyness which invites ambiguity. Furthermore, Anzaldúa deterritorializes the border as a geopolitical line, to address a series of conflictual encounters across the borders of sex, class, gender and ethnicity. As readers of *Borderlands*, we realize that we are all border crossers, although not in the same manner and under similar circumstances.

The dismantling of the notion of the thin border allows Anzaldúa to focus on the multicultural exchanges across both sides of the line. Against the unidirectionality of assimilation, Anzaldúa addresses the two-way, multi-leveled cultural borrowings and displacements occurring in both directions. Anzaldúa thus adopts the role of the mediator, the transculturator, who, in Silvia Spitta's words, appropriates and discards elements from each culture, and thus shapes herself as bricolage (Spitta, 1995: 209). Anzaldúa puts history, culture, and mythology through a sieve, as she "winnows out the lies" (p. 82) and fetters of her culture as Mejicana, Chicana and Tejana. Not only does she explore the multiple crossings between cultures, but also the lot of the border crosser, the cultural and sexual transgressor, the deviant inside one's culture. The mestizo who inhabited the thin lines of Aztlán becomes in Anzaldúa's formulation the *Mestiza* who has to claim her uncomfortable territory to create a new culture, "una cultura mestiza" (p. 22). Mexicanness and Angloness relate to each other across the border to create what Anzaldúa terms "a synergy" of both cultures.

La Mestiza is the unfinished product of these multiple borrowings and exchanges; she emerges from the "choque" or "cultural collision" of two frames of reference, but transcends these two "warring ideals," to use W.E.B. Du Bois's terminology, to include both. In fact Anzaldúa invests Du Bois's formulation with undecidability to emphasize the contact zones, the sites of unequal exchanges, those particular spaces which come as a result of breaking down paradigms and dualities. Not in vain, Anzaldúa invokes Eshu, "Yoruba god of indeterminacy" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 80), to express the crossroads, *la encrucijada* of *la Mestiza*. This new cultural space is unknown and unmapped, lacks certainty, and is based on the revision of rigid conceptual boundaries; for the new *Mestiza* "rigidity means death" (p. 79). Very appropriately, the conclusion of *Borderlands* does not leave the character comfortably situated in mainstream America, but rather, at a painful yet productive site. If Western thinking is convergent and moves towards a single goal, Anzaldúa offers in *Borderlands* an example of divergent thinking, one which moves away from linearity towards an inclusive perspective which allows us to see both sides of the border. This inclusive attitude crystallizes in the new *Mestiza*'s tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity; dualities and collisions are rearranged into a new assembly, a synthesis which in a dialectical manner, provides a new, third, element. For Anzaldúa, that "third element is a new consciousness – a mestiza

consciousness" (pp. 79–89). This mediative space or synthesis-in-process has been previously addressed by other critics such as Bruce-Novoa in his articulation of Chicano art and literature as an "inter-space" which breaks the binaries of Mexico and US. Though Bruce-Novoa, like Anzaldúa, has repeatedly defended his conception of the synthesis as dynamic and dialectical, there always looms the risk of constructing it as the result of the hybrid integration of differential elements. The suggestion of a synthetic stasis appears, for example, in these words by Anzaldúa: "Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality, still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place" (p. 63). Anzaldúa, however, does not clarify what she means by "integration." Equally surprising are the concluding lines to the prose section of *Borderlands*: "This land was Mexican once / was Indian always / and is. / And will be again." *Borderlands* reveals itself circular; it starts with Aztlán, the homeland, to conclude with a neo-nationalist utopian vision of an Indian Southwest, pristine, pure and uncontaminated. In so doing Anzaldúa seems to depart from the protean past of indigenosity through modernity (read: duality) to return to the initial stage of Indianness. The theory of borderlands, as David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen suggest, returns to the homelands (Johnson and Michaelsen, 1997: 14). And yet, in a self-reflexive movement the text itself has prepared us as readers for both contradictory positions as part of the paradoxes of a new consciousness, or as a component of an active and unresolved dialectics which refuses teleological closure.

Interestingly, and notwithstanding these tensions and contradictions, Anzaldúa's concept of the borderlands has been constructed as a utopian, optimistic site of multicultural exchange laden with possibilities of liberation and self-assertion. Debra Castillo refers to this process of mystification in her description of border culture as "an imaginary space," and a "locus for hope," a construction which contrasts with the realities of the actual border (Castillo, 1999: 180, 182). In a similar vein, Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson caution that the term "border" or "the borderlands" goes generally unquestioned, and has been constructed as a "place of politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility" (Johnson and Michaelsen, 1999: 3). This self-complacency in the appropriation of the term has rendered it, as Gómez-Peña has pointed out, totally static, hollow and bankrupt (Spitta, 1995: 197). But when stasis replaces process, the hybrid state acquires the purity it negated in the first place, and consequently, a new form of homogeneity creates and polices new discursive, ideological and cultural borders. And yet, the narrative of process as generated by the borderlands can in fact offer a new paradigm for negotiating and articulating difference beyond the now defunct "melting pot," to use Anzaldúa's words (cf. Anzaldúa, 1990: xxii). For, as Teresa McKenna has remarked, "the dilemma of the mestiza resonates in the dilemma of the Americas" (McKenna, 1997: 132). Anzaldúa's mestiza reactualizes the vision of José Martí's "Our America" and situates *mestizaje*, multiculturalism and hybridity within the United States. *Borderlands*, furthermore, addresses the process whereby cultural, linguistic and political boundaries are eroding, even if at the same time the efforts to police borders have intensified. As Gómez Peña states, "The Middle East and Black Africa are already in Europe, and Latin America's

heart now beats in the US" (Gómez Peña, 1993: 130). What we encounter, then, is a deterritorialized border, repeating itself all over, or, to use Manuel Martín-Rodríguez's term, a "global border."

As a *naual*, a writer or shaper of consciousness, Anzaldúa projects a vision of the future but also allows us to read back into Chicano literature and reopen the borderland paradigm and the way it has inflected Chicano literary tradition. Anzaldúa revisits the oppositional consciousness of the corrido and explodes its patriarchal bias to express the life of a feminist-lesbian. If the corrido makes a paradigmatic oppositional hero of the unjustly outlawed or persecuted, *Borderlands* establishes a similar form of oppositional heroism in the figure of the unjustly (un)documented or marginalized: the queer (Alarcón, 2001: 46). In rewriting the mestizo nation into a mestiza consciousness, Anzaldúa infuses a radical feminist-lesbian agenda into Chicano nationalism, as she erases the borders of Chicano space. She revises the iconoclasm of Rivera's . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra* as she reveals and explores the inner lines which separate Mexican-Americans. Like Rivera's protagonist, Anzaldúa also realizes that the earth does not part to devour her. Furthermore, Anzaldúa's mestiza has made of the indeterminacy of the migrant worker one of her most characteristic features. The openness of the refrain in Rivera's master work, "*Cuando Lleguemos*" ("When We Arrive") acquires new nuances when we think of this middle space and time as the spatial and temporal mappings of our existence. But Anzaldúa also becomes the bridge, the transculturator who, like Antonio in *Bless Me, Ultima*, uses the magic of the letters – in English and Spanish, Tejano and Caló – to create a new collage of cultures without the solid borders of patriarchy which characterize Antonio's mediation. Further, Anzaldúa's borderlands are another name for the kind of literary space Hinojosa has created in his *Klail City Death Trip* series. Anzaldúa herself, as much as her text, has become the ultimate *empapada* in Hinojosa's sense of the word. She is drenched and soaked with the border and its conflictual drives. Furthermore, Anzaldúa's concept of the *atravesado/a* provides the terminology to express the drama of the immigrants who are captured and crossed by the postmodern rendition of the dividing line in Viramontes's "The Cariboo Café."

III. What are the Borders of Borderlands?

The answers are as intricate and complex as the term itself. If we consider the borderland paradigm in its most restricted sense, born into Chicano culture and literature, and nurtured by a genealogy of writers and critics from Paredes to Anzaldúa, then borderland theory may introduce theoretical overdetermination and limit the creative potentials of both Chicano literature and criticism. The borderland paradigm would, from this perspective, become a border of ideological and thematic containment, another manifestation of canon formation in Chicano cultural production. Gómez-Peña cautions about this possibility when he comments that "what today is border culture, tomorrow is institutional art" (Gómez-Peña, 1993: 44). And yet it is useful

to remember that the fuzzy area of the borderlands defies theoretical exclusivity. The plurality of significations of the term points at the impossibility of bordering the concept, and hence facilitates its endless appropriation and diffusion as a paradigm. For the border metaphor, as Paul Lauter has remarked, is especially appealing to activists, inasmuch as it links the transgressions of queers and wetbacks to the politics of sexuality and the politics of immigration (Lauter, 2001: 132). These intricate linkings and crossings in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* explain the inescapable shift from the cultural arena where the metaphor of the border originated to the political terrain where the metaphor is transformed and appropriated (p. 132). And what happens when the migrant metaphor of the border crosses into the territory of other cultures? It remains to be seen if the revisionary agenda of the borderland paradigm can be applied to other literatures to address the grating of one culture against another. If borderlands carry an implicit chronicle of historical and cultural dispossession which is inextricably linked to the material, cultural, and historical experience of Chicanos, such narrative provides for an uneasy fit with cultures rooted in different historical situations. As a case in point, the borderlands, envisaged as a space in between two well-defined nation-states and substantiated around the Mexican–American divide, does not easily translate to the Puerto Rican–American binary, still traversed with colonial dependency issues and where the very existence of the former nation is itself under dispute.

Furthermore, the borderland paradigm hinges upon a specific notion of *mestizaje* which may bypass the detailed exploration of the different components of the term. Anzaldúa articulates her view of *mestizaje* around the “*nos/otras*,” that is, a combination of “us” and “them” in which “we are contaminated by each other” (Anzaldúa, 2000). Yet, in proposing the Chicano as the confluence of Spaniards and Indians (Chabram, 1994: 273) borderland *mestizaje* dissociates itself from other equally hybrid consciousnesses in and beyond the US Latino community. From her African-American perspective, Carol Boyce Davies claims that the construction of a mestizo brownness as championed by borderland critics can constitute another “oppressive border erected against darker-skinned peoples and others who identify as ‘African,’ ‘Afro-,’ or ‘Black’” (Davies, 1994: 16). Though Gloria Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness” calls for Chicanos to reclaim their “*afro-mestisaje*” together with their Indian lineage (Anzaldúa, 1987: 86), her rhetoric and critical genealogy seem to allow for the African element only as an additive. Given their celebration of African heritage, Boricua writers are declared foreigners in the borderlands.

But the borders of the borderland paradigm are also contingent upon the “theory” itself. As the border is disentangled from its physical setting, we run the risk of undermining the materiality and the violence of the line as a representation of asymmetrical power forces. For even if borderlands comes as a “marginal” theory that is partially inside and partially outside the Western frame of reference (Anzaldúa, 1990: xxvi), it does not resolve the discrepancy between the theoretical – if painful – rebirth of the border crosser in the midst of several strings of signifiers, and the reality of the illegal immigrant who encounters a repeating and postmodern border. Whatever theory comes out of the borderlands, then, has to straddle the line between the theory and the

reality it addresses; it has to reinstate power to the disempowered without becoming a new oppressive discourse; it also has to negotiate the well-known fact that the stubborn materiality of borders, like that of race, gender, and class, does not dissolve even if deconstructed by theory.

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Literature-and-Environment Studies and the Influence of the Environmental Justice Movement

Joni Adamson

Near the end of Ana Castillo's novel, *So Far From God*, the people of a small farming and sheep-raising community in northern New Mexico are celebrating the Way of the Cross Procession, a Catholic religious ceremony. Mourning mothers who have lost their children – to toxins in their water, air, and soil or to war – hang pictures of their loved ones around their necks. At each station along the way, people of all races and members of several different grassroots environmental groups stop and talk about the “things that were killing their land and turning the people of those lands into an endangered species” (Castillo, 1993: 241–2). Three Navajo women talk about uranium contamination on the reservation and the babies they have birthed who have had brain damage and cancer.

We hear about what environmentalists care about out there. We live on dry land but we care about saving the whales and the rain forests, too . . . But we, as a people, are being eliminated from the ecosystem, too . . . like the dolphins, like the eagle; and we are trying very hard now to save ourselves before it's too late. Don't anybody care about that?

(Castillo, 1993: 242)

I open this chapter on American Literary Studies, Ecocriticism and the Environmental Justice movement with this conversation between Castillo's Navajo characters about endangered whales and people because it invites readers into what critic Lawrence Buell calls in *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, the “complicated dialogue” surrounding the “environmental imagination” (Buell, 2005: 121). Some of the most complicated issues that environmental criticism has addressed – and some that it has overlooked – were illustrated in a lively 2003 debate between Leo Marx and Lawrence Buell, who are both considered founders of the field of literature-and-environment studies. Marx's groundbreaking 1964 study, *The Machine in the Garden*, urged readers to rethink categories of the pastoral, and the relationships between literature and the natural world. Nearly 40 years later, in a plenary session held at the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment Conference in Boston, Massachusetts, the venerable Marx

challenged Buell, whose book, *The Environmental Imagination*, published in the mid-1990s, had helped map the terrain of a growing literary movement, concerned with environmental crisis, that was coming to be referred to popularly as “ecocriticism.” Some scholars working in this new field expressed unease about the term. Buell himself prefers the term “literature-and-environment studies” because it “takes its energy not from a central methodological paradigm of inquiry but from a pluriform commitment to the urgency of rehabilitating that which has been effectively marginalized [nature] by mainstream societal assumptions” (Buell, 1999: 1091). I would agree, but “ecocriticism” is the term most often used in the publications of the field, and I will use both terms in the discussion that follows.

The Marx–Buell debate took as its starting point one quote from *The Environmental Imagination*. In that text, Buell focuses largely on the writings of Henry David Thoreau to examine the place of nature in the history of Western thought and reflect on the consequences for literary scholarship of attempting to imagine a more “ecocentric” way of being. Marx praised Buell as an admirably committed literary critic and environmentalist and characterized Buell’s book as a wonderfully provocative treatise on nature writing, a genre which emerged, for the most part, from a Euro-American male-centered tradition of natural history and nature experience in “wilderness.” Marx took issue, however, with a sentence, found early in *The Environmental Imagination*, in which Buell seems to discount the ecological import of *Moby Dick* because “Melville’s interest in whales was subordinate to his interest in whaling” (Buell, 1995: 4). Marx argued that literature and literary criticism exclusively devoted to the “whaleness of the whale,” or nature “for its own sake” – as it exists wholly independent of homo sapiens – would not likely be very useful in resolving environmental problems, since the power of humans to modify their environments exceeds that of all other species by orders of magnitude. Buell countered that his comment on Melville’s novel was made in the spirit of “strategic ecocentrism,” or, as a way to suggest that writing, such as Thoreau’s, which celebrates “nature for its own sake,” possibly has greater power to intensify environmental convictions in its readers than writing which focuses on humanity’s penchant for demonizing and slaughtering whales.

Both Marx and Buell (while taking different views on the power of different kinds of writing to engage readers in activism in the defense of the environment) seemed to identify whaling with the technological power of industrial capitalism and its devastating effects on the natural world. But neither, at least in this debate, explored the ways in which the technological power of industrial capitalism had affected people who make no separation between nature and culture and who depend for their survival on sustainable hunting or agricultural practices. For many centuries, for instance, the Inuit of Alaska and the Makah of Washington State have depended for their survival on whaling and every aspect of their culture revolves around the whale (see Freeman 1998). Today, in an increasingly globalized world, these aboriginal whalers are often banned from hunting by an international whaling commission dominated by representatives of industrialized nations and by organized special interest groups – usually conservation/preservation-focused environmental groups – who, for a variety

of reasons, have come to believe that whales should no longer be hunted for food. In fighting for the right to engage in the practices upon which their physical and cultural health depend, both the Inuit and the Makah put people at the center of their concern for the environment. In doing so, they have aligned themselves with an international movement of indigenous groups, labor unions, green business owners, and grassroots environmental activists, among others, who are seeking to end the dominance of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Whaling Commission and other global caretaking institutions which support transnational corporate objectives that contribute to the growth of a global economy in which control over local environments, cultures, education, and health care are no longer in the hands of the people but in the hands of big business.

The plight of the Inuit and the Makah dramatically recalls struggles of the past several decades which have been led by housewives in New York arguing that chemical dumping at Love Canal was the cause of the diseases killing their children, African-American women in South Central Los Angeles blocking the siting of a solid-waste incinerator in their neighborhood, Navajo shepherders and weavers in the American southwest resisting open-pit coal mining on a sacred mesa, and “Zapatista rebels” in Mexico protesting the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on indigenous communal farming. The vigor of these groups’ protests and of the involvement of a wide range of civil rights organizations and community leaders in their local actions, has focused the world’s attention on “environmental racism,” a term which entered into political discussion on the environment in 1987 when the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice published a report that found race to be the leading factor in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. By 1991, many of these groups had banded together, and in October of that year, they met at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, in Washington, DC. Conceptualizing “the environment” much more broadly than conservation/preservation-focused environmental groups, delegates defined “the environment” to mean “the places we live, work, play, and worship.” They described their struggle as an “environmental justice movement” which would seek to end the unequal distribution of environmental hazards in communities of the poor and communities of color, sustain traditional ways of life, and ensure the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment. Today, the perspectives on the environment held by delegates to the Summit and the groups they represent are becoming increasingly recognized not only by conservation/preservation-focused environmental groups and regulating agencies such as the US Environmental Protection Agency, but also by scholars, writers and artists who are representing environmental justice struggles in their scholarship, poetry, fiction, non-fiction, street performance, first-person testimonies and community art. Castillo’s *So Far From God* is one example of a contemporary work of American literature which is representing these struggles.

In his 2003 *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the US and Beyond*, Lawrence Buell squarely sets his own work into these conversations by exploring the effects of toxics in the environment and on the environmental

imagination. More recently, in an incisive summary of the disparate critical practices that constitute “ecocriticism,” he describes the “challenge of ecojustice revisionism” as a “sheer moral force” in academic environmental studies (Buell, 2005: 115). In what follows, I will explore why the Environmental Justice movement’s influences on literary studies presents a “challenge,” in Buell’s judgment, that “should not be underestimated” (p. 115). I will briefly review literature-and-environment studies in the United States since the 1950s, noting how criticism of the nationalistic and ethnocentric tendencies of pastoral, frontier, and wilderness themes in American life and letters spurred the expansion of contemporary American literary studies in the direction of multi-ethnic studies and borderlands studies and influenced literature-and-environment scholars to broaden the definition of what counts as writing about the natural world to include more multi-cultural literature and more in-depth analysis of how nature figures into diverse cultural traditions. Then, in a reading of *So Far From God* which will bring us back to the issue of saving endangered whales and people, I will examine how contemporary American literature which focuses on environmental justice concerns is calling attention to the processes commonly referred to as “globalization” and, at the same time, illuminating many of the key issues currently being debated in the call for a “transnational” American Studies.

In a 1999 session of the Modern Language Association (MLA) Conference, Scott Slovic and Cheryll Glotfelty celebrated the “coming-of-age” of literature-and-environment studies, the field they had helped to organize. After many years of dedicated work towards attaining this goal, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), with Slovic as its first president and Glotfelty as its MLA Liaison, had finally achieved “Allied Organization” status within the MLA. Slovic observed that reaching this goal had been an uphill battle, as it was still the case that many literary critics thought of the study of literature which addresses the natural world as “a nostalgic, millennialist fad, a yearning to resurrect and re-explain a limited tradition of hackneyed pastoral or wilderness texts” (Slovic, 1999: 6). Slovic noted that over the course of a few short years, from 1992 to 1999, “ecocritics,” as the scholars working in this field had come to be called, had rapidly expanded the scope of their study from an almost exclusive focus on nature writing to examinations of a wide range of international and multicultural environmental texts. He defined “ecocriticism” as “the study of explicitly environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach, or conversely, the scrutiny of the ecological implications and human-nature relationships in any literary text, even texts which seem, at first glance, oblivious of the nonhuman world” (Slovic, 1999: 6).

Slovic’s and Glotfelty’s leadership launched a literary movement, but as Slovic accurately observed, many misconceptions about ecocriticism still existed. For instance, a 1998 proposal for a special issue of *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* focusing on environmental literature and ecocriticism had been rejected by that influential journal’s editorial board. Editor Martha Banta, in a sympathetic letter to Slovic (who had submitted the proposal), explained the *PMLA* board’s reasoning: “Environmental literature is generally deemed to be almost entirely an ‘Americanist’

issue, and the Board feared being taken one more time around the track with a flood of essays about Emerson, Thoreau, etc.” Banta noted that many literary scholars still thought of environmental literary studies “as ‘hug-the-tree stuff’ and needed to be educated to the realization that this is a global concern, not tied exclusively to the American situation” (quoted in Slovic, 1999: 6).

Concerns expressed over the perceived “Americanist,” “hug-the-tree” focus of literature-and-environment studies can be traced, in part, to the fact that many of the first scholars working in literature and environment studies in the early 1990s were focusing their teaching and publications almost exclusively on nature writing and natural histories by European-American males. The most influential of these publications, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, helped organize the field by pulling together 25 new and reprinted essays which had appeared previously under headings as varied as American Studies, Women’s Studies, regionalism, pastoralism, the frontier, human ecology, science and literature, nature in literature, and landscape in literature. None of the essays, noted Glotfelty in her introduction to the collection, had been “recognized as belonging to a distinct critical school or movement” (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996: xvi–xvii). Most of the authors of the essays included in the collection focused their examinations on US American writers who catalogued America’s natural wonders, speculated in some way about America’s pastoral promise, philosophized about the transcendent meaning of “Nature,” or lamented the disappearance of America’s “wilderness.” I would characterize the focus of the articles collected in *The Ecocriticism Reader* as the “wilderness preservation approach” to ecocriticism.

Of course, in describing the work that these scholars were doing as “the wilderness preservation approach” to ecocriticism, I recognize that I am reducing the complexity of their research and ideas to a simple phrase. T.V. Reed does a much more thorough and sophisticated job of describing early approaches to ecocriticism in his article, “Towards an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism,” included in *The Environmental Justice Reader*. However, my purpose here is different from Reed’s. Rather than tracing the variegated and manifold approaches to the growing field of literature-and-environment studies as Reed does, I am more interested in examining why the “wilderness-conservationist” approach to ecocriticism came to be dismissed as “tree-hugging” by some in American Studies and why what I call the “environmental justice approach” to ecocriticism – which is built on many of the strengths of the earlier approach but which also attends to the issues of race, class, and gender – unveils some important insights for those who have pioneered emerging areas in contemporary American literary studies – such as transnational criticism.

Most ecocritics recognize several classic works from American Studies, published in the 1940s through the 1960s and still required reading today, such as F.O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* with its chapter on Henry David Thoreau, Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land*, and Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* as the foundational texts of their field. Each of these works, in various ways, explores the pastoral promise of America’s “virgin lands” or the redeeming qualities of America’s “wild frontier.”

Marx dealt specifically with the loss experienced when the “machine enters the garden.” But as Paul Lauter explains in *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park*, “American Studies came into being as an academic discipline in the post-World War II era, as, in part, an expression of American nationalist objectives” (Lauter, 2001: 23). To this end, many scholars of literature, history, and art were seeking ways to express America’s exceptional status in the world. They found that expression in what came to be called the “pastoral promise of America” and in associated notions about “the frontier.” These notions were based largely on the assumption that European and American discoverers or immigrants, in moving from cities or urban areas to the unsettled “wilderness,” shed the trappings of civilization, rediscovered their primitive racial energies, reinvented direct democratic institutions, and thereby reinfused themselves with a vigor, independence, and creativity that were the source of American democracy and national character.

From the 1970s to the 1980s, scholars such as Annette Kolodny and Patricia Limerick challenged these assumptions – which had become the basis of conservation/preservation-oriented environmentalism and which also lay at the heart of wilderness-oriented ecocriticism – by making key categories of experience and analysis, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality central to their analyses. They focused on the ways that national narratives which celebrated the “New World” or “The West” helped to authorize destructive patterns of behavior that led to ecological degradation. Kolodny and Limerick showed that conceptions about the environment held by many European-Americans were not gender-neutral and were often nationalistic and ethnocentric, while the work of environmental historian William Cronon revealed how conceptions about nature or wild places have also been class-bound and how these conceptions have hampered the effectiveness of conservation/preservation-oriented environmentalism. In “The Trouble with Wilderness,” Cronon explains how popular notions about virgin lands or the frontier became linked in the American imagination to conceptions about wilderness conservation. By the end of the nineteenth century, most white, middle-class Americans accepted the impulse to own and master the land as inevitable. However, as great expanses of wild country fell under the plow and the axe, many Americans, under the influence of Romantic naturalists, essayists, and conservationists/preservationists like John Muir came increasingly to value those ever-shrinking rugged terrains in which one might go to perceive the divine or the sublime in nature. Indeed, by the 1890s, when Frederick Jackson Turner concluded that the frontier no longer existed, the remaining wild lands of the West began to be seen as places of religious redemption and national renewal, the last bastion of rugged individualism. The problem, notes Cronon, is that American concepts of wilderness erase a history of genocide and removal since American lands could not be represented as “empty,” “wild,” “pristine,” or devoid of human culture until after indigenous peoples had been expelled from the places they had inhabited for centuries.

Despite the fact that Kolodny’s, Limerick’s and Cronon’s work was published in the 1970s and 1980s, many ecocritics working in the early 1990s failed to acknowledge the ahistorical, gendered, nationalist, ethnocentric, and class-bound tendencies

of pastoral, frontier, and wilderness themes in American life and letters. Some of these critics observed that while scholars had overwhelmingly responded to calls within the academy to address the issues of race, class, and gender, they had failed to address threats to the natural world and that should be seen as a crisis. The problem with these perspectives, of course, was that Kolodny, Limerick, and Cronon has already persuasively pointed to the inextricable links between the issues of gender, race and environment, so the assertion that race, class, and gender had already been adequately addressed in the academy, and now we must turn our attention to the separate, perhaps even more important, issue of environmental crisis implied a separation between “nature” and culture, as if human presence in a place disqualifies it from being considered “natural,” “wild,” or “pristine.”

At the same time, other leading literature-and-environment scholars, Leo Marx among them, recognized that an exclusive focus on the wilderness-oriented approach to ecocriticism would severely limit the scope of the field. In the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty writes that, to date, ecocriticism has been “predominantly a white movement. It will become a multi-ethnic movement when stronger connections are made between the environment and issues of social justice, and when a diversity of voices are encouraged to contribute to the discussion” (Glotfelty, 1996: xxv). Glotfelty’s statement was no doubt well-intentioned but there was some irony in the suggestion that a “diversity of voices” should be encouraged to make stronger connections between the environment and issues of social justice. Outside the academy, environmental justice activists such as those I described at the beginning of this chapter had been raising their voices to challenge limited definitions of “environmentalism” and had been persuasively critiquing the separation of social issues from environmental issues as a blindspot in conservation/preservation-oriented environmentalism.

Inside the academy, a new group of literature-and-environment scholars, including Patrick Murphy, Greta Gaard, and Rachel Stein, whose work I will describe below, were not only listening to the voices of environmental justice activists but, at the same time, paying close attention to academic voices which were articulating issues and positions which resonated with those taken by grassroots, environmental justice activists. These voices were calling for approaches to literature which would move away from an emphasis of what was “exceptional” in American culture towards comparative analyses of the diverse experiences of American-Indian, African-American, Hispanic-American and “other” American peoples. These calls helped move literary studies in the direction of ethnic studies, borderlands studies, and more recently, transnational studies. In one such book, *The Dialectics of Our America*, José David Saldívar looks both inside US America’s borders and beyond to consider the Americas as a hemisphere and raise questions about “what counts as an American text?” Citing Cuban journalist and revolutionary leader José Martí’s 1891 essay, “Neustra America” or “Our America” as a model for a hemispheric reading and critical practice, Saldívar examines Martí’s argument for expanded visions of what counts as “American” or “Our America.” Martí observed that only those who strive to understand the “local

realities” of the hemisphere would understand the diverse elements that make up the cultures and environments of the Americas. (While Saldívar does not make this observation, I want to draw attention to the strong resonance between Martí’s call for more knowledge of “local realities” and the activism of grassroots, place-based environmental justice groups working around the world for their local communities’ survival and continuance.) Saldívar pushes this discussion even further in *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, where he champions a “postnational studies” which would consider the borderlands as a space inherently resistant to being reduced to a “national tradition” and challenges the “naturalized and hegemonic status” of the United States and its territorial stability (Saldívar, 1997: 12, 35). Saldívar’s work has been key to the theorizing of the field of transnational studies. As Shelly Fisher Fishkin notes in her 2004 Presidential address to the American Studies Association, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies,” over the last ten years, Saldívar, among others, has demonstrated why “a web of contact zones has increasingly superseded ‘the nation’ as ‘the basic unit of, and frame for, analysis’” (Fishkin, 2005: 21)

Other feminist, ethnic, gay and lesbian, and borderlands scholars, most notably Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa, focused on cultural, social, sexual and geographic “borderlands” to develop a paradigm for reading “la frontera” both as a consciousness and as a geo-spacial place. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa richly deploys the metaphor of the borderlands to question the common binary of masculine/feminine. By recounting her experiences watching the destruction of the environment in Hidalgo County, Texas, where her family’s lands were literally carried off to market by local farmers and ranchers, she also examines the borderlands as a geographic space where multinational capital and agribusiness have an impact on the physical environment. By transgressing borders of all kinds and connecting social and environmental injustices, work such as Anzaldúa’s helped set the stage for broader literary definitions of what counted as an “American text” and what counted as an “environmental text.”

From the early 1990s, Patrick Murphy, Greta Gaard and Rachel Stein, among others, had been addressing the discrepancy between what does and does not count as an “environmental text” and calling for close, historical readings of how different ethnic groups and races and different genders and classes have understood their relationship to “nature.” For example, in *Literature, Nature, and Other* and *Further Afield in the Study of Nature*, Patrick Murphy builds on the insights of ethnic studies and ecofeminism to argue that if ecological analysis explores how everything in an ecosystem is connected to everything else, then ecocriticism that does not look at the relationship between the domination of women and “others” and the domination of the natural environment fails in its mandate to “make connections” and is not “ecocritical.”

In her monograph, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, and in her critical collection, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, and Pedagogy* (edited with Patrick Murphy), Greta Gaard builds on her own activist participation in the anti-war, anti-nuclear, women’s and environmental justice movements to discuss how ecofeminism and multiculturalism have in recent years become valuable components of ecological literary criticism and pedagogy and have been incorporated into a broader

spectrum of academic discourse, movement coalitions, and environmental consciousness. In *Shifting the Ground*, Rachel Stein argues that, in America, women, Native Americans, and African-Americans, have often been regarded as part of the ground that must be mastered in the name of nation. Stein suggests that writers as diverse as Emily Dickinson, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Leslie Marmon Silko “remind us that the story of nature’s nation is a flawed and dangerous tale and that the social configurations that we perceive as only natural are culturally created and forcibly maintained” (Stein, 1997: 22).

Recognizing the limitations of an ecocriticism that fails to deal seriously with the connections between social issues and environmental issues, an increasing number of scholars have been building on the work of Marx, Buell, Glotfelty, Kolodny, Limerick, Cronon, Anzaldúa, Saldívar, Murphy, Gaard, and Stein and listening to the voices emerging from the environmental justice movement. These scholars began taking what I will call an “environmental justice approach” to ecocriticism. This approach builds on the insights of wilderness-oriented approaches to ecocriticism while taking account of the issues of race, class, and gender. In *American Indian Literatures, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*, for example, I attempted to provide one of the first examples of this approach. I call for more attention to the “literature of environmental justice,” defined not only as poetry and fictional prose treating environmental justice issues but also movement manifestos, EPA documents, and international trade agreements (Adamson, 2001: 129). I argue that those who focus their work around environmental justice issues must take care not to dismiss the important insights of the “nature-oriented writing” of Henry David Thoreau, Gary Snyder, Terry Tempest Williams or the other nature writers championed by ecocritics. Although non-fiction prose which addresses the natural world is still sometimes marginalized within the academy, works such as Thoreau’s *Walden* and Williams’ *Refuge* are deserving of critical attention among literature teachers and scholars because they have been a powerful mobilizing force in the American environmental movement and a positive influence insofar as they have acted as a check on the human inclination to despoil the environment.

In *The Middle Place*, I suggest that by weaving the insights of works such as *Walden* and *Refuge* together with the insights of environmental justice literature such as, Simon Ortiz’s *Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land* or Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, readers and critics gain a greater understanding of nature’s complexities while avoiding the pitfalls inherent in elevating the “wilderness” over the world inhabited by humans. Ortiz’s collection of poetry and prose, for example, draws connections between the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 and the labor and resource exploitation occurring on American-Indian reservations today and depicts people of different racial backgrounds working together to solve the problems of labor exploitation and toxic contamination in their communities. In Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, a fictional army of people marching from Chiapas, Mexico, to the US–Mexican border, helps readers understand why actual eco-political groups such as the Zapatista Rebels of Chiapas, Mexico, began their 1994 armed rebellion on the same day that NAFTA

went into effect and why they insist that their resistance is a protest against the effects of transnational trade agreements on Mayan communal farmers. Both of these works illustrate that the concern for the environment and the movement to protect and conserve it did not start with Thoreau or Williams. For over 500 years, countless groups in the Americas have been voicing their concerns about related social and environmental injustices. Pairing readings of Thoreau or Williams with Ortiz or Silko, then, contributes to a richer, more satisfying critical practice that seeks not only to understand the consequences we face if, say, we choose to drill for oil in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, but also how diverse cultures such as the Maya, Acoma, Inuit and the Mahkah understand “nature” and their relationship to it and why they are not retreating to the wilderness in the face of their challenges but standing their ground in their own communities and actively working for solutions.

Several new critical collections, including *Reading the Earth*, *Reading under the Sign of Nature*, and *The Greening of Literary Studies* demonstrate that literature-and-environment studies is moving well beyond the focus on wilderness. *The Environmental Justice Reader*, edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, brings together 25 new essays documenting the efforts of local groups to organize, mobilize, and empower themselves to take charge of their own lives, communities, and environments and analyzing the ways in which literary representations play an important role in the movement.

A brief critical analysis of Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God* which sets the novel against the backdrop of the environmental justice movement serves to illustrate what contemporary multicultural literature and literature-and-environment studies is contributing to emerging discussions around the possibilities and limitations of transnational studies. These discussions have grown out of the continued expansion, throughout the 1990s, of borderlands studies, which utilize the border as a geo-spatial metaphor, and more recently, which examine the processes by which cultural borders, like political borders, are eroding. I want to suggest that when we examine a novel such as *So Far from God* in light of the inequities being deepened by the forces of globalization, some of the ways in which erasure of meaningful national borders might be counterproductive to the goals and aims of social and environmental justice activism begin to be revealed, and this in turn, illustrates the power of what Buell has termed the “challenge of environmental justice revision” (Buell, 2005: 112).

So Far from God is set in northern New Mexico, in a small town called Tome, which is experiencing some of the highest unemployment in its history, in part, because its traditional Hispano agropastoral farmers are finding it harder and harder to compete against large corporate agribusiness and, in part, because the people’s poverty forces them to sell the land they have lived on for generations to developers who are building luxury houses for wealthy winter visitors eager to tap into New Mexico’s “land of enchantment” mystique. Sofia, the main female character of the novel and mother of four daughters, decides to run for mayor and organize a group of *comadres*, Spanish for “co-mothers,” who form a sheep-grazing, wool-weaving co-op to provide jobs for the impoverished community. Castillo does not specifically call her fictional

characters' actions "environmental justice activism," but her thanks to members of the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) on the acknowledgements page of her novel suggests a link to that group's mission, which is to empower New Mexican Acomunities to realize racial and gender equality and social and economic justice" (see SWOP Homepage). SWOP also educates community members about the role that multinational corporations and multinational trade agreements such as NAFTA play in the present age of globalization. Such educational initiatives better prepare people to protect their communities from the outside political forces exerted by high-tech and extraction-type industries like mining, cattle ranching, timber, and nuclear weapons development. All of these industries have exploited or are still exploiting the natural, labor and economic resources in New Mexico.

Sophia and her comadres are not only providing their community with opportunities for education, they are raising questions about the toxic contamination caused by the "high-tech" industries located in nearby urban areas where their children are moving to take jobs and escape the high unemployment in their own communities. The concern over toxics links Castillo's fictional comadres to another environmental justice group in the American south-west called Comadres. This binational women's group works on the US-Mexico-Arizona-New Mexico border to improve the living and working conditions of factory workers in the maquiladoras which began being built south of the US-Mexico border before the passage of NAFTA and which sprung up by the hundreds after the passage of that tri-national trade agreement. The efforts of Comadres to assist maquiladora workers, who are mostly poor women of indigenous and Hispanic decent, is documented in an interview with Teresa Leal, founder of Comadres, in "Throwing Rocks at the Sun," included in *The Environmental Justice Reader*. As Leal explains in her interview, maquila workers are often asked to handle toxic substances and factories frequently dump carcinogenic chemicals directly into the sewer systems from which the toxic substances get into the local community's drinking water. In the novel, Castillo depicts this sort of labor exploitation and toxic contamination, when one of Sophia's daughters, Fe, takes a job in a factory where she is exposed to chemicals used in the process of building weapons for the Pentagon. Shortly thereafter Fe miscarries a baby, and her family begins smelling chemicals on her breath. Her ghastly death clearly alludes to the kind of chemical handling and dumping which workers employed by multinational industrial plants are routinely required to perform.

Fe's miscarriage and death illustrate why grass-roots groups must do more than reflect on nature's wonders if they hope to save their children and communities. Contemplative reflection, of the type we often find in nature writing or natural histories, can help us appreciate nature's processes, but it cannot, by itself, lead to a clear understanding of the processes at work in a world where "free" trade agreements favor transnational corporations which allow persistent organic pollutants (POPs) to escape into our environments and find their way into our body fats and breast milk, damage reproductive systems, and literally threaten a community's health and survival. Just as Sophia must struggle to understand Fe's death, there are small environmental justice

groups in every region of the Americas organizing to resist what Teresa Leal (in a personal conversation with me about the high numbers of people dying from toxin-caused cancers) describes as the “rising body count.”

When we put the novel into a context with the activities of SWOP, Comadres, and the Makhah whalers described above, readers of *So Far From God* begin to better understand why Sofia and her comadres must challenge mainstream conservation/preservation environmentalism. In the Way of the Cross Procession scene described at the beginning of this chapter, a Catholic religious ceremony quickly turns into a protest over women’s, worker’s, economic, and toxics issues. Mothers, like Sophia, who have lost children to toxic exposure hang pictures of their loved ones around their necks. At each station along the way, people of all races and members of several different grassroots environmental groups stop and talk about the “things that were killing their land and turning the people of those lands into an endangered species” (Castillo, 1993: 241–2). The words, “we, as a people, are being eliminated from the ecosystem, too . . . Don’t anybody care about that?” (p. 242) poignantly reveals the limitations of an environmentalism that advocates “saving the whales” while refusing to see the people who have been exposed to toxins as “endangered.”

Fe’s exposure to unseen chemicals also helps to illustrate why place-based environmental justice groups cannot afford to focus solely on local community issues, but must challenge transnational corporate rhetoric about the benefits of free trade and globalization by gaining a broad understanding of global politics, civil rights legislation, toxics issues, and multinational trade agreement law which might effect their communities. Many environmental justice groups, including SWOP and Comadres are fighting the release of unseen toxins in the work place environment and in their community. But their fight is daunting because NAFTA gives transnational corporations almost free reign to pollute. As they have learned by educating themselves about international trade law, NAFTA’s chapter 11 gives corporations and individual investors the right to seek reimbursement for any law or regulation that impinges upon the company’s future profits, while preventing nations and states from seeking protection within their own national and state court systems. For example, in 1999, California Governor Grey Davis authorized the phase-out of methanol, a gasoline additive proven to cause cancer and to be almost impossible to remove from groundwater. After the phase-out was ordered, Methanex, the Canadian corporation which makes methanol, sued the state of California for 970 million dollars for enacting an environmental regulation which impinge on the right of Methanex to generate future profits in that state. Under the regulations and rules of NAFTA, California will not be allowed to participate in its own defense. Thus, NAFTA is designed to shrink the power of governments, cripple attempts to regulate corporations, and undermine long-established national protections for social welfare and economic justice, environmental values, and individual rights, not just in the US, but in Mexico and Canada as well (Greider, 2001: 20). Under NAFTA, states and governments must “pay those businesses or individuals whose property [or future profits] is in some way diminished by public actions” (p. 21). More frighteningly, the George W. Bush administration sought to extend these

NAFTA Chapter 11-type regulations to 31 more Latin and South American countries under the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement (FTAA).

Castillo's novel, read from a perspective informed about the issues of race, class, and gender and environmental justice, envisions what cross-border, cross-ethnic affiliations organized around feminist struggles, human rights and environmental concerns might look like. The novel also depicts the consequences of an increasingly globalized economy on local communities. Thus, the novel points not only to the possibilities for a postnational studies which would erase borders and thus encourage the creation of new activist affiliations, it also calls on literary critics to pay attention to the proximity of some forms of postnational criticism to the rhetoric of globalism, which celebrates the weakening of borders so that capital and ideas can supposedly flow freely. As Claudia Sadowski-Smith asserts in her introduction to the edited collection *Globalization on the Line: Culture, Capital, and Citizenship at US Borders*, much of the work currently being done in the area of postnational studies leaves border eradication in the realm of metaphor and culture and fails to examine the actual consequences of globalization and free trade on real world communities. Sadowski-Smith adds that often this scholarship "leaves unexamined the potential of nation-states to shelter their populations and help preserve the public sphere" by enforcing labor laws, preventing human rights violations, and enforcing environmental regulation (Sadowski-Smith, 2002: 11). In short, the environmental justice approach to literature asks critics to render all environments, places, borders, and boundaries under examination tangible and visible in both imaginary and geo-spacial terms and this, I would argue, is where the potential for making major contributions to American Studies and transnational studies lies.

As a scholarly perspective, and as an academic "movement," ecocriticism claims no single, dominant guiding approach. But there does seem to be one constant in the field. *The Ecocriticism Reader*, *The Environmental Imagination*, and *The Environmental Justice Reader* all illustrate that literature-and-environment studies promotes a sense of activism and conveys the idea that readers and scholars alike should be active in the fight to change human relations to the natural world. The role of the "ecocritic," writes Cheryll Glotfelty, is "to ask how literature and literary criticism can be a force for or against environmental change" (Glotfelty, 1996: xix). The notion that literary studies should be a force for change is nothing new. Seventy-five years ago, observes Paul Lauter, leading American Studies scholar F.O. Matthiessen set an example of a teacher and literary critic who worked to situate his own practice in ways that would bring "self-serving ideologies under scrutiny and illuminat[e] alternatives" (Lauter, 2001: 50). Matthiessen wrote about the American Renaissance but also worked as an activist from the 1920s through the 1950s in support of teachers' unions, New Mexican miners, and longshoremen.

Today, many literature-and-environment scholars are keeping that tradition alive, as they move beyond simple critique of environmental racism towards discussions of how we might recover and promote sustainable alternatives to environmental destruction. As the world is increasingly shaped by the forces of globalization, motivating effective environmental action will take much more than bringing people to a consciousness

of “nature for the sake of nature.” The work that artists, writers, activists, and literary critics can do, as I see it, will be to analyze and interpret literary texts, movement manifestos, or trade agreements in ways that make critical interpretation and political activism meaningful, creative – and possible. They would seek to understand how nature has figured in different cultural traditions in the Americas and around the world. They would authorize the interrogation of borders of all kinds, their economic and racial origins, and their social and environmental consequences. They would disseminate this information in ways that are accessible to diverse communities of people working for change. They would facilitate the formation of alliances by framing human experiences in ways that encourage us to be responsible to each other and to the environments we inhabit.

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Endowed by Their Creator: Queer American Literature

David Bergman

Before examining a category of writing called “gay and lesbian American literature,” we need to examine the very terms of the category, and no subject has been as vexed by nomenclature as sexuality. Indeed the term ‘sexuality’ has proved a problematic rubric by its imposing a classificatory system on to feelings and behaviors that had previously remained inchoate. “Homosexuality” has been a particularly troublesome word; coined in Hungary in 1869, it was almost immediately criticized for being a rather barbarous amalgam of Greek and Latin. Homosexuality is one of a number of words including “sexual inversion,” “Uranianism,” and “contrary sexual feeling,” which were coined at about the same time, to replace such invidious terms as “sodomy” and “buggery.” Each of these words addresses same-sex behavior or feeling differently, and the success of *homosexual* has less to do with its intelligibility, and more to do with its flexibility since it can serve as both a noun and an adjective.

The battle over nomenclature did not stop with the coinage of “homosexuality.” During the 1960s, “gay” and “lesbian” became terms of choice for many men and women engaged in same-sex activities. In the 1980s “queer” emerged as a term adopted by those who wished to challenge heterosexuality as the norm (heteronormativity) as well as gender conformity by taking a term of disapprobation and turning it into an honorific. It also brought attention to the fact that no term is neutral, but fraught with cultural, political and social implications. Anyone exploring the subject of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer literatures must deal with the wide range of terms with their own ideologies, histories, and purposes.

These terms not only map the shifting attitudes, beliefs and theories about sexuality, but they also embody those changes. Yet the issue is not whether people think about erotic feelings differently at different times and in different places – clearly the Puritans who put sodomites to death viewed sexual behavior differently than the young people from Wyoming who killed Matthew Sheppard for being a “faggot.” The issue is, rather, whether these ways of regarding same-sex relations are so different that they bear nothing in common or sufficiently similar that they can be placed

in genealogical succession. The debate divides “social constructionists” on the one hand from “essentialists” on the other. By “essentialism,” theorists refer to the belief that same-sex activity is unchanged through history and in all cultures. Essentialists tend to look for biological factors for sexual orientation; social constructivists believe that sexuality is a historical phenomenon, shaped by environmental, political, historical, and social forces. Essentialism and constructivism inform the way authors represent sexuality. *Brokeback Mountain* (1999), for example, represents the love between Ennis and Jack, two cowboys, as a “natural” urge with which society interferes. Thirty years earlier Alma Roustang, using the pseudonym Isabel Miller, wrote *A Place for Us*, reprinted as *Patience and Sarah* (1969), in which the love of the eponymous characters who live in a farming community in early nineteenth-century New England represents lesbian attraction as not just natural, but also supernatural since the author claims that Patience and Sarah’s spirits direct her pen as she writes their story. In contrast, Bruce Benderson in both his fiction and his memoir *The Romanian* (2006), represents sexual relations as shaped by social and economic factors, and Blanche McCrary Boyd in her hilarious lesbian romp *Revolution of Little Girls* (1991) also views sexuality as socially constructed.

Essentialists tend to emphasize the similarities between manifestations of same-sex relations while social constructivists tend to place more weight on the differences. Although we must be sensitive to the particular cultural and historical context of writing, we must not become so obsessed by such differences that we are blinded to useful connections. These same issues are raised in discussions of national literatures: national boundaries are arbitrary and porous and, some theorists would argue, impossible to define; yet it is also blind to pretend that there are not differences between American literature and Chinese literature. All of this is to say what should be obvious but seems to need endless restatement, namely, *there is no single entity that we can point to as Queer American Writing, but there are clusters of texts that bear significant relationships to each other, that helped make each other possible, and that both grew out of certain related experiences and projected certain expectations of experience.* For better or worse, these texts (whose number, position and relationship are never stable) are for convenience termed “queer American literature,” or “gay American writing,” or “lesbian American texts” or any of a number of permutations on these terms.

I have generally used the term “same-sex” to refer to relations between persons before the nineteenth century, “homosexual” to refer to such relations from the nineteenth century to the late 1960s, and “gay” and “lesbian” to refer to them after the late 1960s. I have referred to women engaged in same-sex relations as “lesbian.” Such terms have been adopted to respect the differences in such formations while suggesting continuity.

American literature is inescapably queer. The most obvious reason is that so many of the canonical figures of American literature are “queer,” that is, outside of traditional gender and sexual boundaries. No map of American literature could be drawn without finding a place for Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Henry James, Henry David Thoreau, Willa Cather, HD, Hart Crane, Gertrude Stein, Langston Hughes, Tennessee

Williams, or Elisabeth Bishop to name just a few of the important writers who have experienced homoerotic attraction and engaged in same-sex erotic activities. No doubt some will demand the Polaroid test of literary criticism – incontrovertible evidence of an author in the arms of a person of the same sex – and for many authors there will never be such a smoking gun. One sign of heterosexism is the belief that an author must be presumed heterosexual until proven otherwise.

But the institution of American literature and the condition of queer writing intersect in another, more profound way. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has popularized the notion of the “homosocial,” the social arrangement that puts people of the same sex in powerfully charged relationship to one another, a charge not unlike erotic “cathexis,” although one of the conditions of the homosocial is a heightened fear and stigmatization of homosexual contact. Given American culture’s privileging of people on the frontier, its elevation of rugged individualism, and capitalism’s need for competition, it has had a particular tendency to represent characters in homosocial environments whether on rafts floating down the Mississippi or as Little Women keeping the home fires burning. Ernest Hemingway’s hypermasculinized fictional heroes (as well as his public persona) derive both from the heightened homosocial environments he chooses to write about (war, big game hunting, bull-fighting) and the anxiety about same-sex affection and contact. The desire to be men together is fueled in large measure by the fear of being called a sissy. But the specter of the queer rises not just from the hyper-masculine world of rugged individualism; the communal nature of the democratic enterprise also engenders homosocial hopes and anxieties of homosexuality. It is not surprising that two of the most enduring political works of mid-twentieth-century American literature, *Advice and Consent* (1959) and *The Best Man* (1960), concern the scandal of a candidate’s possible homosexual relations nor that the author of *The Best Man*, Gore Vidal, is a self-identified “homosexualist.”

Leslie Fiedler, 50 years ago, argued for the profound relationship between American literature and homosexuality, a relationship that cut across the Red Skin (rough and plain) and Pale Face (elite) branches of American writing. Indeed, what we now regard as canonical American literature is in large measure shaped to highlight the work of the “queer” in American writing. Before the 1920s, the genteel tradition of James Russell Lowell and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whose works maintain fairly standard gender and sexual roles, had a central place in the canon. But with *The American Renaissance* (1941), F.O. Matthiessen placed at the heart of American literature five writers who challenged genteel values: two essayists (Emerson and Thoreau), two novelists (Hawthorne and Melville), and one poet (Whitman). None of these writers can be said to have adhered to standard sexual or gender patterns. Even given this limited pantheon, Matthiessen, a homosexual, tilted his appreciation toward Thoreau, Melville, and Whitman, the three whose works had unmistakably homoerotic elements. By placing Whitman as the climax of his book, Matthiessen paid homage to the author who, as can be seen from Matthiessen’s letters, had most helped in his coming-out process. The challenges to the canon have not made American writing less queer. Conservatives who wish to freeze the canon in the form it took in the 1950s face

the uncomfortable prospect of celebrating a rather disturbing body of work that does not obviously reinforce conservative sexual and gender values.

Any discussion of the “queer” in American literature must soon address Walt Whitman. He places himself squarely, in fact, bodily into his work; and he tells the reader as much – reading *Leaves of Grass* is handling his body. For Whitman, the physical man and the physical poem are coterminous. Much of post-modern thought has been directed at breaking down the relationship between the signifier and the signified and between text and authorship. But Whitman’s work is dedicated to confounding poem and author, body and the words about the body. It is significant that a great number of gay writers saw the post-modern belief in “the death of the author,” although enunciated by the gay Roland Barthes, as a move more fitting to heterosexual writing than to gay writing. Robert Ferro, for example, believed that by seeing texts as merely a play of other texts, theorists were setting up a situation in which gay (or homosexual) experience, which had been insufficiently represented, would be further silenced. In a similar vein, the writers associated with the New Narrative, such as Robert Glück, Bruce Boone, and Kevin Killian although quite conscious that equating author and authorial voice was problematic, insisted in the importance of drawing their fiction from their everyday lives and by bringing into their stories and novels their actual experiences. Queer writers have been extremely interested in blurring the generic lines between autobiography and fiction. Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* highlights the complexity of autobiography in ways that are meant to be particularly queer and this has led to a cluster of texts which invites the reader to feel a sometime squeamish or lascivious delight in the proximity of the text and the author’s body. That gay or queer author’s play on the closeness between text and body may come from the awareness imposed on them of being self-constructed, of inventing themselves not only as gay people, but as straight people who can pass in a homophobic society. If Whitman is a man closely bounded by his body, he is also limitless and ethereal, “a Kosmos.” His insistent “Song of Myself” is a carefully orchestrated, even operatic, assumption of many voices, and it inspired an important strain of queer writing based on conflating the genuine and the theatrical.

We may also find in Whitman the tension between the joy of liberated sexuality and the frustration with unsatisfied individual relations. The Calamus poems, the section of *Leaves of Grass* most intensely focused on same-sex relationships, “the manly love of comrades,” is also a section haunted by loneliness, frustration and isolation. Love of males does not translate, in Whitman, to the love of an individual man no matter how devotedly he wishes such a relationship to be consummated. Of course, only one Elizabethan sonnet sequence ends happily, and it may be the very nature of love poems – whether to persons of the same or the other sex – to be about unrequited or unfulfilled love. But the heterosexual love sequence at least holds out the possibility of marriage, whereas the Calamus poems can imagine only a distant future that would give same-sex relationships stability. Michael Moon has powerfully argued that the strength of Whitman’s handling of sexuality is the very instability of its terms, but

there can be no doubt that for Whitman (or at least the speaker of these poems) such openness is purchased at a high price.

Whitman articulated an anti-elitist, populist same-sex eroticism, which has not only had a strong influence on other American writers, but on the international scene. He was a cult figure in late Victorian England, looked towards as a sage by Swinburne, John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter and Oscar Wilde, the last two making pilgrimages to his Camden, New Jersey, home. But he has had perhaps an even greater impact on Spanish-speaking writers through Lorca and Paz and even pan-African writers, including Francophone writers of northern and western Africa. Whitman's cosmic embrace has allowed him to be accepted globally, but particularly by authors trying to find a way to articulate their same-sex eroticism to a larger community. Within American gay writing, his presence is strongly felt in such writers as Hart Crane, Allen Ginsberg, and Alfred Corn, to name three very different poets of different generations. So central is Whitman's achievement in American poetry that homophobic writers such as Ezra Pound have had to make their "pact" with him. Because of Whitman, the gay poet never was marginalized like the gay novelist (perhaps since poetry was already marginalized and considered sissy). I do not mean that gay or homosexual poets could be explicit, but they did not have to use the same degree of subterfuge.

The language that Whitman used to describe male–male relations, "the manly love of comrades" and "adhesiveness" – although in his day explicit enough to make some people (including an employer) regard his work as obscene – is highly ambiguous, and as he grew older, Whitman modified his poems and his personal history to make his position even more ambiguous. He invented children, an entire brood of them. When John Addington Symonds wrote to Whitman asking if he advocated sexual relations between men, an old, increasingly famous Whitman wrote back, no. It would be anachronistic to say that Whitman went back into the closet; what would be more accurate is that Whitman responded to the late nineteenth century's increased stigmatization of same-sex relationships. Yet oppression of homosexual men and women was not consistent across regions, classes, and races. A high point of homophobic hysteria was reached with the Oscar Wilde trial of 1895. Yet at the same time in England and in Germany, movements arose to decriminalize homosexual relations as the Napoleonic Code had done.

The Roaring Twenties saw a "pansy craze" in the US, and homosexuality was not – at least among the urbane – a condition to be hidden. Yet the depression dampened any organized efforts to change the general attitude toward homosexuality. Nevertheless immediately after World War II, both men and women who had fought in the war or worked in factories, began to produce literary, political and cultural work meant to advance their position. These efforts were stopped by the general Cold War hysteria that found subversive any deviance from a rigid code of behavior. The Cold War fear of difference was enforced by congressional hearings that equated homosexuality with communism (just as Stalinism equated homosexuality with bourgeois decadence), laws that banned homosexuals from emigrating to the country, employment policies that removed suspected homosexuals from the government, justice department suits to

ban as obscene any work of fiction that represented homosexuals in a positive light, and post office actions that made it difficult for gay publications to be sent through the mails. The 1950s saw an unprecedented attack on homosexuality even as there were unprecedented attempts to change laws and alter public opinion. Clearly cultural attitudes toward same-sex relations are not stable – some of the harshest measures were only taken in mid-century – and writers (depending on any number of variables including their personality, social position, financial freedom, aesthetic values and immediate historical and cultural environment) respond with various degrees of sexual explicitness.

Recent historians have made increasingly clear that no simple narrative adequately reflects the complex history of homosexual people, contradicting the early gay liberation belief that before the Stonewall riot in 1969, gay culture was entirely one of sexual repression. Now it is clear that public acceptance of same-sex relations – whether we term them “lesbian,” “gay,” “homosexual,” “transgender,” “queer,” “inverted,” or “perverted” – waxed and waned. Big cities, perhaps because of the possibility of anonymity, provided environments in which same sex communities could thrive. But small town America found its way to come to peace with the spinster ladies who lived together and the confirmed bachelors who befriended misfit boys as one can see from the stories of Sarah Orne Jewett and from Dawn Powell’s *The Tenth Moon* (1932). A scandal could ignite a firestorm of homophobia. Men regularly lost their jobs when arrested in bars or in public areas. But most gay life went on as the diary titled *Jeb and Dash* (1993) makes clear. Written by a government clerk in Washington, DC, and covering the years 1918–45, Jeb Alexander’s diary shows how an unremarkable homosexual man lived in rooming houses, the YMCA, and apartments, had a circle of friends, favorite restaurants, and other public places in which to congregate and cruise. The specter of the police was never far away, but it did not seem to interfere too much in his daily life. Christopher Isherwood’s diaries of his rather privileged, bohemian existence in Hollywood right after World War II present a picture of gay life in which sex was so open, frequent, and riotous that it seems no different from the 1970s or what Brad Gooch has termed “The Golden Age of Promiscuity.” The publication of Susan Sontag’s diaries provides a glimpse into the life of a privileged lesbian. Sontag’s diaries show the disconnect between how open people are in their personal lives and how explicit they are in their writing, or to put it differently, the pressures on expression cannot be determined merely by looking at the immediate daily life of people.

Coming out of the closet has not been the panacea hoped for during the sexual revolution. To be sure, explicit gay writing has become easier to publish and distribute, yet as many have pointed out, coming out as gay reinforces the gay/straight dichotomy, which is a foundation of homophobia and heteronormative values. Gay and lesbian writers may feel relief that they no longer have to erase their same-sex feelings or translate them into heterosexual characters and situations, but the need to encode their experiences forced lesbian and gay writers to develop ingenuity and resourcefulness, and the very blurring of situations and expressions may have acted to subvert the stark polarities that the gay/straight divide creates both in literature and in society.

Three elements factor into any account of queer literature: (1) the sexual orientation of the author (2) the style and content of the work (3) the audiences for which the work was intended. Each of these elements is problematic.

We have already discussed briefly two of the problems of determining sexual orientation of authors from the past: (1) they may have lived in a time when sexual orientation was constructed differently, thereby making it problematic to call them “gay,” “homosexual,” “lesbian,” or “queer”; (2) biographical information may not provide the clear indications demanded by some scholars. For example, the rhetoric of romantic friendship seems remarkably erotic to our ears, but often the endearments were just conventional. Some scholars have discounted the homoerotic expressions in Dickinson’s and Whitman’s letters as merely examples of romantic friendship. But there is the larger question: does authors’ sexuality – however that may be defined – necessarily affect their writing? Does not a belief that queer authors necessarily produce queer works ghettoize and limit their works? Here again we can see how liberating an author by outing his or her sexuality may in fact imprison them. Edward Albee, for example, believes so strongly that reading the relationship between George and Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) as a disguised homosexual relationship is so destructive and limiting – based as it is on the belief that a gay man could not produce an accurate representation of heterosexual marriage – that he refuses to permit performances of the play by all-male casts. As inviting as it may be to draw direct relationships between what authors write and whom they love, such practices are often reductive and trivializing.

One of the more obvious ways in which style may be affected by a writer’s sexuality is that many authors have had to find ways around censorship in order to get their works published. But the banning of homosexual content was rare; more frequently authors censored their work themselves by making homosexuality a subtext or encoding sexuality through gay argot. Gertrude Stein’s sketch “Miss Furr and Miss Skeene” (1922), originally published in *Vanity Fair*, repeatedly uses the word “gay,” but although *Vanity Fair*’s readers regarded themselves as sophisticated, they were generally unaware of the word’s meaning within homosexual circles. Presumably, if readers better understood her use of the word, the story would not have been published, at least not in *Vanity Fair*. The two women hang around men who “were not heavy,” that is, they were *light*, a word used more often than as a euphemism for homosexual. The two women wish to “cultivate their voices.” The phrase is wonderfully suggestive in this context – indicating not only a desire to become better singers, but also writers who can “learn to be gay” and teach others “ways to be gay.” But by suggesting that Gertrude Stein’s style was in part a manifestation of her sexuality, I am not saying that there is a direct relationship between her sexuality and her style. Rather I am suggesting that Stein’s style developed in a complex environment of which her sexuality was one element. Willa Cather, who was born a year before Stein and died a year later, wrote very differently.

Playwrights are under more scrutiny by censors and more vulnerable to popular attitudes; therefore when *The Glass Menagerie* was produced in 1945, Tennessee Williams

did not try to be explicit about Tom's homosexuality. Instead he used another strategy – the curious omission. Tom tells his mother that he goes to the movies every night. His mother, Amanda, doubts this and demands to know where he *actually* goes. The question is never answered, and Amanda never asks about the women Tom might be seeing or expresses concern about getting him married – curious omissions on the part of a mother so worried about her children. Amanda and Tom's silences subtly suggest that Tom is cruising for men and that Amanda understands what she will not permit herself to acknowledge. Homosexual male and female writers often embed in their works narrative or linguistic gaps that are significant for the curious reader. Yet another way poets were able to get around censorship is by addressing love poems to an unspecified "you." Here is Amy Lowell's poem "A Burnt Offering" in its entirety:

Because there was no wind,
The smoke of your letters hung in the air
For a long time:
And its shape
Was the shape of your face,
My Beloved.

The poem provides the reader with no clue about the speaker's or the beloved's sex or any clear reason for burning the beloved's letters. Yet the destruction of the letters is not, if one guesses from the tone, out of anger, but rather from a desire to protect the beloved. By keeping the *you* ambiguous, the poem protects both the author and the beloved. These are three strategies that gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer writers developed to speak about their sexuality in ways that would allow them to continue publishing.

The question of audience is a particularly vexed one. There were, of course, private publishers, to whom homosexual authors turned, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century. There were also small exclusive publishers whose limited editions were marketed for a special sophisticated audience. Starting in the 1920s some commercial publishers – Greenberg was especially significant – published important works of explicit homosexual content. Particularly after World War II, it issued the groundbreaking volume *The Homosexual in America* (1951) and such novels as James Barr's *Quarterfoil* (1950) and *Derricks* (1951), and Loren Wahl's *The Invisible Glass* (1950). Its success in reaching a gay readership ended in a suit from the Justice Department. The first exclusively gay publisher was Lynn Womack, a sleazy businessman, whose Guild Press left authors unpaid and creditors holding the bag. For nearly two decades he avoided federal attempts to shut down his operations, even winning a Supreme Court case against the post office. But even bigger houses quietly put together gay lists that the discerning reader could discover. Signet, a mass market paperback imprint, would add to its editions of Truman Capote or Paul Bowles a list of other books a reader might enjoy, and these lists would include works mostly by other homosexual authors. Clearly the editors understood that not all readers were heterosexual and authors understood that gay readers would understand elements of their work

heterosexual readers were likely to miss. Still it was not until the late 1970s that major publishing houses made gay fiction a regular part of their offerings. Straight editors sometimes felt considerable anxiety about missing the homosexual subtext of works. In 1944, John Crowe Ransom, the editor of *The Kenyon Review*, accepted Robert Duncan's poem, "An African Elegy" for the journal, but when Duncan published his essay "The Homosexual in Society," Ransom withdrew the acceptance, explaining that he now saw the poem as a "homosexual advertisement." Not only did gay readers look for the queer parts, but straight editor did too, concerned that unbeknownst to them, they might be giving a platform for what they considered to be gay propaganda.

Duncan's rejection is an unusual event because for the most part gay and lesbian poets have had less difficulty than prose writers and because they have never operated under the commercial constraints of fiction writers. The audience for poetry has always been small, and publishers have rarely justified such publications in the name of profit. Many of the most important poets in the second half of the twentieth century have been lesbian, gay or bisexual, including Elizabeth Bishop, Allen Ginsberg, May Swenson, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, Marilyn Hacker, Audre Lorde, Richard Howard and the poets of the so-called New York School, Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery and James Schuyler. Some have been very oblique in their references to their sexual orientation; others have been quite outspoken. Elizabeth Bishop, for example, only makes reference to being a lesbian in very few poems and then obscurely. In "Insomnia," according to Lorrie Goldensohn, "if the reader blinks twice the subject . . . goes right on past." In contrast, Allen Ginsberg courted censorship when he referred in "Howl" to those "who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy."

Before the last 25 years, in which there has been a continuous stream of prose works by gay men for gay men about their experiences, homosexual male literature seems to have flourished in various "waves," as Ethan Mordden has called it. Speaking of "waves" is more for convenience since no fixed boundaries can be given to periods of productivity. Nevertheless at various times there has been a denser cluster of works appearing, and it is useful to see these clusters in relationship to more general changes in American culture. The first wave occurred at the turn of the twentieth century and continued on until World War I. The first American novel concerned chiefly with homosexuality is *A Marriage below Zero* (1889) by Alfred J. Cohen writing under the name Alan Dale. A more important work was *Imre: A Memorandum* (1908), privately published by Edward I. Prime-Stevenson under the name Xavier Mayne, which unlike *A Marriage below Zero* directly attacks homophobia. Henry Blake Fuller privately published his rather campy book *Bertram Cope's Year* (1919). Such a wave corresponds to a period of reform in American society. The second wave began in the late 1920s and continues on until the early 1930s, when the Depression shifted the focus. This was a period of prosperity and crucial social changes along gender lines. The third wave occurred immediately after World War II and lasted until the mid-1960s. Once again, returning GIs and post-war prosperity were challenging established racial, political, and gender patterns. In the mid-1960s appeared the works that can be identified with

gay liberation and a self-consciously gay literary movement, and again these correspond to renewed efforts to reform gender, race, and economic structures. Post-modern and queer writing has emerged significantly in the wake of AIDS, which has inspired some of the most moving and beautiful writing by gay men and lesbians. Rebecca Brown, Sarah Schulman, and Sapphire produced works no less powerful than Paul Monette, Mark Doty, Larry Kramer, or David Wojnarowicz.

A lesbian history both coincides and is loosely bound with the gay male efforts, but in many ways constitutes its own history. In England, the Bloomsbury group (roughly between 1904 and 1939) is a clear example of how gay, lesbian, and bisexual (and heterosexual) artists and authors gave support to one another. In American literature, the accounts of the Stein circle usually emphasize Gertrude Stein's importance to such heterosexual artists as Picasso and Matisse, Fitzgerald and Hemingway, but Stein was supportive of a large number of both male and female writers and artists who were homosexual: Thornton Wilder, Glenway Wescott, Janet Flanner, and Margaret Anderson. She took care of Fritz Peters, author of *Finistere* (1951), one of the finest gay novels of the post-war era, when he was a boy. The avant-garde tradition that runs through Stein, H.D. and Djuna Barnes continues today with such writers as Carole Maso, Rebecca Brown, and Eileen Myles.

Even more than gay male writers before World War II, lesbian writers needed to encode or clothe lesbian relations. In some respects, women could speak about romantic friendship well into the twentieth century without creating "lesbian panic" in their readers. Later it became more difficult. Stein's "Lifting Belly" is at once highly sexual and utterly obscure. Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936), although much more explicit, was published with an introduction by T.S. Eliot, which assured that it would be regarded as "high art" with the requisite difficulty. And, of course, the setting was Paris; continental writers such as Thomas Mann, André Gide, and Colette were allowed a license to write about homosexuality not extended to the home grown. H.D. wrote highly charged lesbian fiction, but kept it unpublished while she was alive. Even in the 1950s, Patricia Highsmith published her most explicitly lesbian novel *The Price of Salt* (1952) under a pseudonym. Willa Cather explores lesbian relations chiefly by projecting them on to non-sexually active males. Although *Death Comes to the Archbishop* (1927) is literally about a virtually all-male society, it might be more accurately described as a single-sex environment in which the gender of the characters is secondary. Lesbian writers were no doubt warned from becoming too explicit by the censorship trial of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) although they may have been encouraged by the book's sales: 10,000 copies were sold of the American edition in the book's first year. Nevertheless far fewer explicitly lesbian novels than gay male novels were published either before the Depression or immediately after World War II. Explicitly lesbian novels seemed to have developed with Second Wave feminism.

Writing in 1951, John W. Aldridge, a critic of some standing at the time, wrote in *After the Lost Generation*, "Homosexuality and racial conflict seem to be the only discoveries which the new writers have been able to make so far in the area of unexploited subject matter." The immediate post-war generation produced such novelists as

Gore Vidal, Paul Bowles, James Baldwin, Truman Capote, and James Purdy, but also Tennessee Williams and William Inge, playwrights whose work was reaching a far larger and more popular audience. But there were many writers now almost forgotten whose work deserves wider attention – for example, James Barr, Fritz Peters, and Alfred Chester. There was a similar appearance of lesbian writers as well, the most famous of which are Carson McCullers, May Sarton, Patricia Highsmith, and Jane Bowles. The most common topics were homosexuality in the army and in prep schools. John Horne Burns took on both subjects in *The Gallery* (1947) and *Lucifer with a Book* (1949). Sometimes as in Calder Willingham's *End as a Man* (1947), set in a military school, the two come together. But some of the more important novels by heterosexuals took up the subject, such as Norman Mailer's *Naked and the Dead* (1948) and J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) in many ways represents the end of the wave of post-war gay fiction.

The crackdown on gay books by law enforcement agencies pushed gay writing into pulp and pornography. Pornography by the standards of the 1950s and 60s, although it contained explicit erotic scenes, was not the endless sequence of sexual exploits we now associate with the term. Indeed, it covered any work that presented same-sex relations in a positive light. Women still make less than men, but in the 1950s and 1960s lesbians were particularly at an economic disadvantage, and the appearance of cheap drugstore paperbacks such as Ann Bannon's Beepo Brinker books, *Odd Girl Out* (1957) and *I Am a Woman* (1959), whose titles alone would alert readers to their content but whose lurid covers have made them collectors' prizes, reached a far larger audience than the more literary works commercial publishers were enjoined from issuing. For gay men the pulp books of *The Song of the Loom* trilogy contained among the most positive images homosexual men could find before Stonewall. The government's campaign to drive gay and lesbian books out of the bookstores had the unintended consequence of driving them into the drugstores and bus stations and into the hands of a far larger number of readers.

Although gay male writing began to be published by mainstream commercial presses in the 1970s, lesbian writing relied for much longer on small alternative feminist presses that emerged out of the women's movement, particularly Daughters Inc., Diana, Persephone, and later Seal, Crossing, Naiad, Firebrand, and Spinsters, Inc. Of special note is Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, which was established to advance lesbian writing by African-American and Latina writers. A clear example of the importance of small presses was the publication of *A Place for Us*. Alma Roustang was an established novelist before she penned *A Place for Us* under the name of Isabel Miller. Unable to find a publisher for the work, she financed the book herself with the small Bleecker Street Press in 1969. Only when the book won the first Gay Book Award of the American Library Association did McGraw-Hill reissue the book as *Patience and Sarah* in 1972. Clearly economics has affected lesbian writing in ways that it has not affected gay men's writing.

The turning point for commercial gay men's fiction seems to have been 1978 when Larry Kramer's *Faggots*, Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance*, and Edmund White's

Nocturnes for the King of Naples were all profitably published by different houses. All three works by self-identified gay authors deal with gay subject matter. More important, none of these books tries to “explain” gay life to its readers; they all assume that a reader is sufficiently knowledgeable to pick up some of the arcane references contained in the book. Such a strategy was not entirely new. It may be found in Christopher Isherwood’s *A Single Life* or in Jean Genet’s novels. White and Holleran later became part of the short-lived writers group The Violet Quill, which included Felice Picano, Robert Ferro and George Whitmore. The group struggled in its few meetings to deal with the problem of how to create an autobiographical fiction that was true to their experiences as gay men. With Richard Hall and Paul Monette, these men were responsible for the first cluster of post-Stonewall gay fiction.

The history of African-American writers who were engaged in same-sex relations differs from the history of gay and lesbian writers of European descent, and yet they ride similar tides. Many African-Americans who engage in same-sex relations do not identify as either gay or homosexual, and families, notably in the case of Langston Hughes, have been extremely careful to separate these writers from what they regard as gay appropriation. But just as the late 1920s opened up avenues of expression for white gay writers, it also opened up possibilities for the Harlem Renaissance writers, many of whom had relations with people of the same sex. The two most important patrons of these young writers Alain Locke, a black philosophy professor at Howard University, and Carl Van Vechten, a white journalist, novelist and photographer, were both homosexual. The most explicitly homosexual member of the Harlem Renaissance was Richard Bruce Nugent. Wallace Thurman, who lived with Nugent and Hughes, gives a highly suggestive picture of their life together in *Infants of the Spring* (1932). Countee Cullen’s poetry is riddled by carefully encoded references to being gay. The blues provided women with an outlet to express lesbian experiences, even as Ma Rainey dares her listeners to “prove it on me.” Nella Larson’s *Passing* (1929), ostensibly about passing for white, also suggests passing as heterosexual. Angelina Weld Grimké’s most passionate lyrics to women were not published in her lifetime.

Perhaps it is the pressure of being a double minority – a racial and sexual minority – that has either forced African-American writers to be bravely explicit, skillfully evasive, or carefully round-about. Claude McKay carefully screened out any references to his homosexual experiences from his work. One strategy followed by Willard Motley in *Knock on any Door* (1947) and James Baldwin in *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) is to cast only whites as homosexuals. Although Baldwin was later to represent blacks as engaged in same-sex relationships, he was always careful to insist on their bisexuality. After Eldridge Cleaver mercilessly attacked Baldwin in the vilest terms, Baldwin became more careful in his public statement about his own sexuality even as his fiction became more explicit about the sexual attraction between black males. The Baldwin–Cleaver exchange shows how careful black gay writers had to be in the face of homophobia within the black community. The remains of this difficulty are visible in the work of Lynn Harris, the highly popular novelist, whose glamorous male characters are carefully positioned as bisexual and, therefore, not wholly alienating to his legion of

female readers. But black gay writers have also written directly and boldly including Samuel Delany, Hilton Als, Essex Hemphill, and James Earl Hardy.

Lesbian women writers of color have enjoyed remarkable success. Such writers as Alice Walker, who identifies herself as a heterosexual, has placed same-sex love at the heart of *The Color Purple* (1982) and Gloria Naylor, another straight black woman, has attacked homophobia in *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982). But the success of lesbian black writing has in large measure been created by three remarkable women writers – Audre Lorde, Bertha Harris, and Ann Alice Shockley – who in the early 1970s began publishing work in small presses, particularly Barbara Smith's Kitchen Table Press, that is notable for its literary excellence and formal experimentation. Today June Jordan, Sapphire, and Jewell Gomez, to name only three, continue this work.

Latino and Latina writers have also been important. John Rechy produced one of the first books about gay life – *City of Night* (1963) – that became a best seller. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga edited the groundbreaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), which was published by Persephone Press, a small women's publishing house, and both went on to write their own works. Xavier Emmanuel, a poet and novelist, writes about New York's Latino youth.

One of the most important expressions of queer experience has been in the theatre and performance. A number of gay playwrights beside Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee have regular Broadway production: Terrence McNally and Landford Wilson, for example. The lesbian playwright Paula Vogel saw her AIDS play, *The Baltimore Waltz* (1992), arrive on Broadway. The explicitly gay play emerged on Broadway with the 1968 production of Matt Crowley's *Boys in the Band*. But it took a while for most gay plays to migrate to Broadway through off-off-Broadway where Landford Wilson made his start in the Caffé Cino, and where Doric Wilson and Robert Patrick also began. Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy* (1981) also made its initial appearance off-off-Broadway. Still many playwrights both gay and lesbian have not aspired to the commercial theater. Maria Irene Fornes's work resists such treatment, as does the work of Split Britches and the Five Lesbian Brothers, two groups that work collaboratively. Lesbian theater can be said to begin with Jane Chambers' *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* (1982) a lovely, but structurally conservative play (Chambers had made a living writing for television soaps). Charles Ludlum, who led his Ridiculous Theatre Company before dying of AIDS complications, brought to audiences some of the most inventive work produced in America. Tony Kushner's two-part fantasia on national theme, *Angels in America*, owes a debt to the low budget epic scale and anti-realism of non-commercial queer theater, but he brings to it a new political intensity and moral complexity.

Today, gay and lesbian literature is haunted by the specter of the crossover novel – a work of gay and lesbian literature that seeks to attract audiences outside of the gay and lesbian community. Lynn Harris has succeeded, at least with straight, black women. Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* books have found a large appreciative audience. Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (1998), which won the Pulitzer Prize, and became

a widely-seen film, clearly indicates that a work of exceptional skill can find broad appreciation. But there appear to be limits at the moment in how far heterosexual American audiences will accommodate themselves to gay or lesbian subject matter. Edmund White, who has a large European following, has not been able to establish the same crossover readership in the United States, and David Levitt, after an initial success, has had difficulty maintaining his audience. Dorothy Allison found success with her novel *Bastard out of Carolina* (1993), which keeps its adolescent narrator's budding lesbian tendency, under wraps, but Sarah Schulman, a novelist, essayist and playwright of extraordinary range and vitality, has been unable to find the same wide readership because of the explicit lesbian content and the political radicalism of her vision.

Lesbian and gay literature finds itself in a difficult situation. Books of merit can attract a large enough readership to be commercially successful, but the niche is not large enough to make them big sellers. In the 1980s and 90s, such a "mid-list" position was enough to maintain the interest of major publishers; however, as publishing has become more centralized and gobbled up by multinational media conglomerates, which have reduced their fiction lists in general, gay and lesbian fiction and non-fiction have suffered. St Martin's, one of the pioneers in gay writing, has ended its Stonewall Inn Editions, which had published over 100 gay and lesbian titles, and the Perseus Publishing Group closed down its Carroll and Graf division, which had concentrated on gay and lesbian titles. Consequently, gay and lesbian writers are once again relying on small publishers (including university presses) to put their voices into print.

Contemporary Native American Fiction as Resistance Literature

Arnold Krupat and Michael A. Elliott

Insofar as the literature of the United States has come to be recognized as multiculturally constituted, contemporary Native American literature may be considered in relation to African-American, Hispanic, or Asian-American literatures, among others, each of these a component of what anthologies like the *Heath* or the *Norton* present as a diverse or differential *American* (US) literature in the singular. But contemporary Native American literature, fiction in particular, may also be considered as part of a global literature working to resist European colonialism, as part a global body of writing usually referred to as “post-colonial literature.” This affinity exists in spite of the fact that there is no “post-” as yet to the colonial situation of the indigenous nations of the United States. Native peoples continue to live in a condition that Thomas Biolsi and Larry Zimmerman have called the “late imperial” (Biolsi and Zimmerman, 1997: 4); they remain, that is, “domestic dependent nations,” the appellation invented for them by Chief Justice John Marshall, in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831). To undo their paradoxical or oxymoronic status as “dependent sovereigns” – to resist colonial limitations on their *sovereign* rights as nations – is the foremost aim of Native nations today. Thus it is that Native American writers who seek to advance this goal often find their work taking forms that bring them as near to some African novels as to African-American ovels, to South American fiction as well as to Chicano/a fiction as a consequence of colonial histories and legacies.

By briefly treating the work of three contemporary authors – Leslie Marmon Silko, Linda Hogan, and Gerald Vizenor – we hope to demonstrate the force of the anti-colonial imagination at work in Native American fiction, as well as the different forms that this imagination may take. Space constraints require us to work with a few texts as representative examples – metonyms, perhaps – of larger bodies of work; the accounts we offer below might, with some adjustments, stand in for accounts of other Native fiction of the period.¹ In this chapter, we will try to understand resistance to colonialism as being articulated through three overlapping, and potentially complementary perspectives – perspectives we call *nationalist*, *indigenist*, and *cosmopolitan*.

The call for nationalist resistance in the Native American novel has been most strongly articulated by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, in a manner that, as Eric Cheyfitz observes, “is first of all *political* in the *activist* sense of the word” (Cheyfitz, 2006). This requires, as Cook-Lynn writes, that Native fiction “take into account the specific kind of tribal/nation status of the original occupants of this continent” (Cook-Lynn, 1996: 93). For instance, in *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Craig S. Womack argues that Creek literature, both oral and written, sustains and participates in the creation of Creek tribal nationalism. At the same time, Cook-Lynn has lamented the absence of a fully articulated, full political nationalist perspective in Native American contemporary fiction; she admits that even her own novel [*From the River's Edge* (1991)] shows an “appalling” “intellectual uncertainty” about matters of politics and sovereignty (Cook-Lynn, 1996: 85). Readers are unlikely to find Native American literature, as Cook-Lynn suggests, written solely from a nationalist perspective. However, we think they will frequently find tribal nationalism at work in contemporary Native fiction in a dialogue with indigenism and cosmopolitanism.

From an indigenist perspective, it is not the nation, but the “earth” that is the source of the knowledge and the values that constitute one’s resistance to colonialism. In Linda Hogan’s novel, *Power* (1998), Omishto, the narrator, remembers a time when “The whole earth loved the human people” (Hogan, 1998: 229). *Power* concludes with Omishto dancing, while “someone sings the song that says the world will go on living” (p. 235). The “world,” here, is obviously not the world of nations and nationalisms, but, rather, the animate and sentient earth. Indigenists look to a particular relation to the earth as underlying knowledges and values that can be called traditional or tribal, and that have been historically lived by indigenous persons (and in some cases can also be embraced by persons who are not, themselves, indigenous). We should also note that *Power*, a text whose commitment to the values of earth is a virtual model of indigenism in Native American fiction, also contains a certain muted nationalism: Omishto is a Taiga person, and, although she is not given to specific reflection on legal or political issues, she has a decided sense of what could be called the necessity of Taiga sovereignty.

Cosmopolitans understand the identity theme in relation to the “agenda of sovereignty/land” against the backdrop of similar and different worldly or global identities and agendas after and/or in opposition to colonialism. Recognizing the importance of nationalism as a force against colonialism, cosmopolitans also recognize the way in which – as African examples sometimes make clear – nationalism can itself become an oppressor.² Cosmopolitans are concerned to explore commonalities that exceed national boundaries – but unlike an older, now-discredited universalism which saw difference as a problem to be solved, and offered “Eurocentric hegemony *posing* as universalism” (Appiah, 1995: 78), contemporary cosmopolitanism takes difference as a fact of human existence, and a challenge thus to all conventions of “*common* sense.” Cosmopolitan criticism, to take terms from Paul Gilroy and James Clifford, understands “roots” as inevitably crossed by “routes.” Rooted and routed, the cosmopolitan critic rejects no position, a priori, because of its race, nation, gender, or sexual preference,

and selectively supports nationalist and indigenist perspectives in opposition to internal colonialism. These positions, although sometimes construed as in opposition to one another, are often, as we have noted above, overlapping, and interlocking, and they may (although they need not) be complementary to one another. We hope they will provide a starting point for considering how Native American expression uses the medium of fiction in order to address by means of the imagination the ways in which the legacies of colonialism, and Native American responses to those legacies, continue to shape Native American life.

The novelistic career of Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo, 1948–) began with the publication of *Ceremony* in 1977. From that time to the present, *Ceremony*'s indebtedness or, at the least, its relation to Momaday's *The House Made of Dawn* – the Pulitzer-prize winning novel that is generally credited with ushering in the contemporary resurgence of Native American writing – has regularly been noted. Both novels have young, male protagonists of mixed heritage who return from World War II as ill, dysfunctional veterans. The father of Momaday's Abel comes from a different tribe than his mother; the father of Silko's Tayo, on the other hand, is absent, anonymous, unidentified, and a *white* man – an ancestry that makes Tayo's own genealogy one of several figurations of hybridity in *Ceremony*. Even more certainly than *House Made of Dawn*, Silko's *Ceremony* performs the sort of ideological work Anthony Appiah has identified for what he calls the first-stage of postcolonial African novels.³ These novels, according to Appiah are “anticolonial and nationalist,” and are “the imaginative re-creation of a common cultural past that is crafted into a shared tradition by the writer . . . The novels of this first stage are thus realist legitimations of nationalism: they authorize a “return to traditions” (Appiah, 1995: 149–50). *Ceremony* authorizes a return to tradition as it chronicles Tayo's adventures in living out the (ceremonial) vision “seen” for him by an odd but unquestionably powerful Navajo *chanter* or *singer*, named Betonie, someone more adept, it is hoped, in treating Tayo's particular condition than old Ku'oosh, the Laguna specialist, has been. After a series of adventures that we will not attempt to detail here, and, in particular, after a refusal to act revengefully, Tayo returns to his people, apparently “cured.” The novel ends with a quasi-ceremonial invocation: “Sunrise, / accept this offering, / Sunrise” (Silko, 1977: 275), testimony, it would seem, to the recuperability of a “common cultural past,” a “shared tradition,” and a “return to traditions.” The current availability (or at least its availability around 1945) of the Laguna “way” is also reinforced by the novel's ideologically functional claim that certain “mythic” persons (e.g., Ts'eh Montano and her husband, The Hunter) are not only mythic but “real.” You can go home again, Silko's novel seems to say, for the traditional world of the Pueblos, however it may be threatened, is nonetheless still functionally available and vital. The book is fundamentally about the possibility of recovering a coherent, though changing, sense of tribalism, the kind that might be the precursor to a more politically activist form of nationalism.

Silko's second novel, *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) is markedly different from *Ceremony*. Here there is no intact culture to which one may return. To the contrary, it is almost as though Silko had taken the advice given to Marlow in Joseph Conrad's

Lord Jim, “In the destructive element immerse.” For *Almanac*, unlike *Ceremony*, is not set in the post-war 1940s but in the horrific 1990s, where drug deals, the pornographic representation of torture and death on video, traffic in weapons and in body parts, and cynical real estate scams define the Western “culture of death” in the Americas. *Almanac* devotes 763 pages to illustrating the statements Silko has placed in two boxes in the lower left-hand and lower right-hand corners of an annotated “Five Hundred Year Map” of northern Mexico and the southwestern United States; the map (in the paperback edition) is printed just after the table of contents.

The left-hand box, labeled the “Prophecy,” reads: “When Europeans arrived [in the Americas], the Maya, Azteca, and Inca cultures had already built great cities and vast networks of roads. Ancient prophecies foretold the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. The ancient prophecies also foretell the disappearance of all things European.” The right-hand box, called “The Indian Connection,” states: “Sixty million Native Americans died between 1500 and 1600. The defiance and resistance to things European continue unabated. The Indian Wars have never ended in the Americas. Native Americans acknowledge no borders; they seek nothing less than the return of all tribal lands.”

Almanac offers a dramatization of the ongoing “Indian Wars” in our time. It tells of the movement of armies from north to south and south to north to rid the Americas of “all” – or at least the most destructive – “things European.” The north–south, south–north directionality here (we shall see something similar at work in Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*) in itself is important, contesting, as it does, the directionality of the dominant, colonial narrative of a “destined” (e.g., “manifest destiny”) progressive movement of “civilization” from east to west, from “sea to shining sea.” This change in the direction of *where* is important because it underwrites a change in *what* is important. And, too, we must note that not all of Silko’s “Indian” warriors are of Native American ancestry; her politics are not racialized. From the north, New Age pop spiritualists, guerilla eco-warriors, homeless Vietnam vets, Lakota militants, a barefoot Hopi, and a Korean-American computer genius, among others based in the US, begin a march southward. At the same time, marching northward from Central America, comes a “People’s Army” of Indians led by nonviolent twin brothers and a Mayan woman strategically committed to handheld missile launchers and rockets. Both groups will converge on Tucson, the eccentric center of the story (and the place where Silko wrote all or most of the novel), and the meeting of these two forces will signal the beginning of the end of invader/settler dominance of the Americas. *Almanac* elaborates a commitment to a transnational solidarity that is not based on blood, a pan-Americanism, as it might be called, in which all those who adhere to tribal values of life and healing may work together against the culture of death brought from Europe but not strictly European. This commitment, based as it is on indigenist values, may be considered a type of cosmopolitan patriotism, and it is also consistent with nationalism.

The indigenist perspective operates, as we have suggested – although there is not space to develop the suggestion – in terms of Silko’s insistence on the values of “life,” values indigenus to the peoples and cultures of the Americas, but available to others

as well. The nationalism, as Eric Cheyfitz has demonstrated, has to do with *Almanac's* clear awareness of the history that turned "the Pueblos into reservations, thus bringing them under the colonial regime of federal Indian law," appropriating or putting constraints upon the land without which there can be no concept of the nation. As Cheyfitz further shows, Wilson Weasel Tail, a character who appears only toward the end of the novel, and a character who may in part serve as a representation of the author herself, offers a transnational "cry for all the dispossessed," but he "necessarily grounds that cry . . . in nationalist terms, nationalist in *both* the Native and nation-state sense of the term," implying that "revolutions can only take place in specific locales by overturning specific institutions."⁴ The land must be returned to the people whose inalienable relation to that land, whatever federal law may say, cannot be abrogated.

Certainly a relation to their tribal land is central to the identity of Sister Salt and Indigo of the (invented) Salt Lizard people in Silko's most recent novel, *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999). For all of their travels – Indigo's travels include extended stays in England and Italy, as well as other parts of Europe – the two sisters remain focused on the necessity of a return home. Indeed, Shari Huhndorf has seen the book as emerging into a kind of reverse captivity narrative (Silko, 1999: 190). After their mother's and grandmother's deaths, Indigo and Sister Salt are captured by police. Sister Salt is sent to a nearby reservation, and Indigo is sent to the Sherman Institute, in Riverside, California, one of the now-infamous government boarding schools. So far, there is nothing "reverse" about Indigo's captivity, which parallels the unfortunate lot of a great many Native children forcibly removed from their homes from about 1875 until the end of the Termination policy in 1970 and taken to schools for what David Adams has called an "education for extinction."⁵

But Indigo successfully runs away from school, only to be taken in by a curious Anglo couple, Edward and Hattie, then to accompany them (she travels with Hattie, for the most part) on a tour of Europe, exploring English and Italian gardens at some length. Huhndorf writes, "Instead of meeting her fate in the white world, Indigo," as Silko tells her story, "will find the tools necessary for her own survival and, by implication, the survival of Native America" (p. 191). Indigo's "education" out of school among the whites will not, therefore, be an "education for extinction," but, rather, one for "survival." Her home is in the desert with her sister and other of their people, so she is clearly a Salt Lizard person – with a difference. As in *Ceremony*, a kind of cosmopolitan experience will make possible the continuity of tribal nationalism.

Linda's Hogan's three novels – *Mean Spirit* (1990), *Solar Storms* (1995), and *Power* (1998) – work together to demonstrate how an indigenist perspective can serve as both a lens for the interpretation of history and the basis for forms of opposition to colonial violence. Hogan (Chickasaw, 1947–), who has also written several volumes of poetry and books of non-fiction prose, has described her own writing in terms that situate it in relationship to colonial histories and that underscore its political aims. Equally significant, she has insisted that "for me, the things that are very important, the spiritual and the political, are very united" (Bruchac, 1987: 131). In her fiction, this emphasis

on the equal importance of the spiritual and the political emanates from a pan-tribal sensibility that aligns indigenously – regardless of tribal affiliation – with a respect for and stewardship of the earth. Claims of sovereignty, therefore, are less the function of tribally-specific nationalism and instead more closely tied to the recognition that the land itself enjoys a status superior to the more recent political claims of humans. Bush, who resembles Hogan as a Chickasaw woman who has left her family's Oklahoma home, explains this principle in deceptively simple terms in *Solar Storms*. "What is the land," she rhetorically asks, "if not the earth's?" (Hogan, 1985: 283)

Bush's question and its answer reverberate throughout Hogan's fiction, in which she establishes a relationship between indigenous peoples and the land by showing them to be linked targets of Western colonial violence. In *Mean Spirit*, the Indians of the Oklahoma town Watona respond to the violence around them by gradually choosing to move away from behavior associated with assimilation into a Euramerican, capitalist society in favor of religious beliefs – such as the Peyote church – and other practices associated with pan-tribal indigenism. Moreover, several of the main characters choose to move away from Euramerican society in a more literal fashion by relocating to the settlement of the Hill People, a group that has avoided direct contact with white Americans and has carefully maintained its traditional practices. On the one hand, the movement toward the Hill People seems like a return to a specific tribe and location – something more in line with a nationalist position; on the other, it also encompasses characters from several tribes (Osage, Creek, and Seminole) and even a few whites, like a priest who gradually realizes that he has been mistaken in preaching that only the human is sacred.

A long novel with a plot that takes several dramatic turns, *Mean Spirit* does not suggest that this adoption of an indigenist perspective will be easy. Among the characters Hogan uses to figure the struggle is Michael Horse, a water diviner whose predictions have become unreliable, but who carefully records the escalating violence suffered by his Osage community. The narrator points out that

If they [the white government clerks] knew he kept a journal of all the events in Watona, if they knew he had translated three languages back and forth during the Boxer Rebellion in China, they would have found a way to cut him down to the size they wanted him to be, and he knew it.

(Hogan, 1992: 60)

This passage not only identifies writing as a dangerous act, but also links it to acts of travel and translation. At the beginning of the novel, Horse is identified as "one of the last proud holdouts from the new ways" (p. 13), yet the skills that he will need to identify the deeper truths of what is happening at Watona will require him to speak in ways that can be understood by a large, diverse audience. By the end of the novel, Horse is living among the Hill People and composing his "Gospel According to Horse." A work at once religious and political, Horse's "Gospel" supplies what he believes is missing from the Christian Bible: "Honor father sky and mother earth," it reads. "Look after everything. Life resides in all things, even the motionless stones" (p. 361).

Hogan, moreover, connects Horse's writings to a history of Native indigenism by having one of her characters note the resemblance between the Gospel and "what Peacemaker of the Iroquois Nations used to say." Horse replies, "The creator probably spoke the same words to him. It wouldn't surprise me at all" (p. 362).

Horse's efforts to write down an indigenist consciousness in a manner accessible to Natives and non-Natives alike express a kind of optimism at the conclusion of *Mean Spirit*. His "Gospel," in fact, predicts that "a time will come again when all the people return and revere the earth and sing its praises" p. 362) – a prophecy that resembles the predictions of Silko's *Almanac*, though Horse's work does not seem to share the Almanac's violent overtones. The novel contrasts the optimistic results of Horse's struggle for an adequate language with a failed search to find a legal remedy for protecting either the land or the Indians who live on it. Stace Red Hawk, for instance, a Lakota who works for the US Bureau of Investigation (the precursor to the FBI) eventually resigns his position when he realizes that the law will not provide any kind of adequate protection for the Osages and their land. He, too, joins the Hill People, an event that signals the abandonment of one kind of effort at legal redress for another type of indigenist activism.

The tension between indigenism and the law returns in Hogan's subsequent novel, *Solar Storms*, which begins in 1972 as a kind of coming-of-age story for its 17-year-old protagonist, Angela (or Angel) Jensen. Angel returns to Adam's Rib, the place of her birth near the northern boundary of the United States. Having been raised in distant foster homes, Angel does not know her Indian mother, Hannah, but she does bear the scars of physical abuse inflicted by her mother.⁶ What she finds at Adam's Rib is a pan-tribal community filled with female survivors, including Bush, a Chickasaw woman who was the second wife of Angel's father. Bush becomes a new maternal figure for Angel, and she organizes a canoe expedition to the north that includes Angel as well as Angel's grandmother and great-grandmother. As William Bevis noted long ago of the fiction of Momaday, Silko, and James Welch, homeward journeys figure prominently in several Native-authored novels (Bevis, 1987: 580–620). In *Solar Storms*, the journey north and the return south, to home, functions as the means by which Angel comes to understand her relationship to tribal histories and her relationship to the natural world. Like Silko's *Almanac*, *Solar Storms* reorients the colonial, east to west narrative of Manifest Destiny in North America to a south-to-north axis. In this case, Hogan uses the journey of Angel and her foremothers to create an indigenous geography that reaches as far north as the villages of the Inuit and as far south as Oklahoma, Bush's home.

While the journey north has personal significance for Angel – who hopes to find her mother there – and for the other women, Bush's goals are political, for she intends to join the struggle of Cree and Inuit villages against the hydroelectric construction that threatens them. This resistance to the Canadian government forms the second half of the novel, and James Tarter has demonstrated Hogan's accuracy in depicting the James Bay Hydroelectric Project and indigenous resistance to it during the 1970s, although the novel never actually uses the James Bay name. Like the novelistic community of Adam's Rib, the struggle against the dams required an indigenous coalition

that crossed tribal lines – an alliance that required a common indigenous response rather than a tribally specific one because of the size and scope of the James Bay project (Tarter, 2000: 137–42). What distinguishes *Solar Storms* from *Mean Spirit*, in part, is the ultimate success of this pan-tribal resistance to the encroaching violence against the land and the indigenous presence on it.

But the success is not total. Near the conclusion of *Solar Storms* one of the tribal elders who has spearheaded the resistance testifies in an urban courtroom, presumably the Quebec court that had original jurisdiction over the tribes' lawsuit against the hydroelectric project. While Angel realizes that this testimony is only partially effective – for the white listeners still regard Indians as “only a remnant of the past” (Hogan, 1985: 343) and are reluctant to accept indigenous perceptions of the truth – the legal action does finally lead to the cessation of construction on the dams (p. 344), just as it did in Canadian history. *Solar Storms* is careful to note that legal institutions are not prepared to accept the stories of an indigenous consciousness as valid in their own terms – something painfully true to anyone familiar with the history of Native litigation in either Canadian or US courts.^{8/7} However, it also suggests that indigenous movements can force the law – again, with much struggle – to acknowledge the legitimacy of resistance to the continued colonization of the earth, even if only in small ways.

Power resembles *Solar Storms* insofar as it links a coming-of-age story to questions of indigenous resistance to violence against the earth. In *Power*, Omishto, whose name means “the One Who Watches” (Hogan, 1998: 4), is a 16-year-old Taiga Indian who – in the aftermath of a hurricane – accompanies her aunt, Ama Eaton, as she pursues and kills an aging panther. Ama is subjected to two trials – one conducted under what Omishto calls “American law” (p. 138) and the other by a council of traditional Taigas at what the novel names as “the place of old law” (p. 149).^{9/8} In each case, Omishto is called upon (as her names suggests) to serve as a witness, and the book revolves around her struggle to understand her aunt's actions. In the first case, the killing seems to violate federal law because the panther is a protected species; in the second, Ama appears to have ignored the tribal traditions that regard the panther as sacred and that prohibit its slaughter except in a ritually prescribed manner. Omishto is haunted by Ama's actions and her own: “I wonder why did I take part in something so terrible that when dark night engulfs me and I wish for sleep there is none” (p. 126). By making Omishto the narrator of the novel, and by placing her consciousness at its center, Hogan focuses on a protracted struggle to understand the extraordinary actions that might be necessary to “restore this world to balance” (p. 189). She comes to realize that Ama understood herself as a participant in an “old story that we must have followed” (p. 93), a story that necessitated the killing of the panther and perhaps even Ama's subsequent banishment from the tribe. Her understanding includes the recognition that such sacrifices can become catalysts for the restoration of the world.

Power has neither the complexity of plot, the number of characters, nor the historical setting of Hogan's earlier novels. Instead, in *Power* Hogan offers her readers a more sustained meditation on questions of individual responsibility. The novel describes

Omishto as the “smart daughter” who was believed capable of proving to others “that we are not at the bottom of the world” by succeeding in ways that would be visible to those outside the tribe. Instead, she comes to believe, like Silko’s Tayo and several other protagonists of Native American fiction, both in the necessity of stories – “Stories are for people what water is for plants,” she says near the end of the novel (p. 227) – and in the stewardship of a “dying” earth (p. 231). Rather than return to high school and pursue her studies, Omishto decides at the conclusion of the novel to join the old Taiga people in the swamps – and these Swamp People seem to be the low country equivalent for the Hill People in *Mean Spirit*, who are also named for the land. The book urges us to consider this conclusion as a method of engagement with the world rather than a retreat from it. In its last paragraph, which we have quoted in the introduction to this chapter, Omishto dances “and as the wind stirs in the trees, someone sings the song that says the world will go on living.” In the face of a long history of Western colonialism, the possibility that the world as Omishto knows it will continue stands as the kind of hope that guides all of Hogan’s fiction.

Gerald Vizenor’s playful erasure of the divide between the real and the fantastic, his penchant for creating self-referential fictional worlds, and his continuing engagement with post-structuralist philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard have made his writing one of the few examples of a sustained engagement with post-modernism by a Native American author. Vizenor (White Earth Anishinaabe, 1934–) has written over ten books of fiction that are unique in their refusal to document tribal experience in a neo-realist manner. The result can be an imagined universe that seems to be possible only in textuality – a world of “fantastic historiography,” “fabulation,” and “mythomania,” to use Frederic Jameson’s terms for postmodernist writing (Jameson, 1991: 368). For this reason, Vizenor’s narrative stance frequently seems to share post-modernism’s ambiguous ideological position, in which the world of the imagination is a kind of last resort rather than a blueprint to an improved social reality. However, as Jameson points out, postmodernist fiction may also, “by its very invention and inventiveness endorse a creative freedom with respect to events it cannot control,” thereby stepping “out of the historical record itself into the process of devising it” (p. 369). In this way, the fantastic historiography of someone like Vizenor can “rattle the bars of the national tradition and the history manuals” through the withering indictment of parody (p. 369). Vizenor’s fiction rattles precisely these bars, the bars of traditions and histories that have attempted to contain the Native presence in North America – which he has called the “terminal creeds” or “manifest manners” of colonial dominance.

Vizenor works toward narrative liberation in two senses: liberation *through* new narratives of imagination, and liberation *from* narratives of historical and political identity. However, Vizenor has also implicitly suggested that a cost of liberation might be that Native peoples will have to forego some narratives that have enabled national and tribal resistance. In his recent non-fiction, such as *Fugitive Poses*, he has stated the necessity of finding new ways of conceiving of and speaking about Native sovereignty – ways that will be distinct from “treaty sovereignty” (Vizenor, 1998: 188) or territorial

sovereignty “in the sense of colonialism and nationalism” (p. 183). In other words, Vizenor has called for a sovereignty of a less material – perhaps even less political – and more cultural kind than that which has been pursued by the tribes themselves and by nationalist Native literary critics such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn.

Throughout his fictional writing, the trickster has been the figure that links this kind of radical liberation to the imagination. Vizenor’s tricksters – themselves reimagined from oral Anishinaabe traditions, are mythic comedians whose wild humor, as one of his characters states, “has political significance” (Vizenor, 1991: 166). Moreover, Vizenor has used the trickster as a way of voicing skepticism about nationalist narratives of tribal sovereignty – and indeed any narrative that he feels complicit with the history of colonialism. The result is a program of resistance that is not political in any narrow sense; instead, throughout his career Vizenor has emphasized the trickster as a figure of openness and possibility – of skepticism of “terminal creeds” and the articulation of “unusual manners and strategies” (Vizenor, 1981: xii). The trickster can function in Native American fiction as a way of imagining a world free of colonialism, a decolonized or even tribal world, though perhaps tribal in a way differing from the past, a sort of post-tribal tribalism. In Vizenor’s fiction, the trickster produces a critique of colonialism through games of satire, parody, and chance, and in this way never actually stands altogether outside of the colonial scene. Vizenor has also insisted that the trickster is not a literal, representational figure, but rather a way of being and a shared language. “The tribal trickster is a liberator and healer in narrative, a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagination,” he writes in his influential 1989 essay on “Trickster Discourse” (Vizenor, 1993: 187).

Instead of conventional plots, Vizenor’s fictional works offer complicated attempts to articulate the social spaces in which the trickster values named above – compassion, humor, and imagination – might be given full reign to transform the world. This streak of comic utopianism, of imagining a truly decolonized or post-colonial world, means that his novels rarely concern the recovery of tradition or a reconnection with a landscape, as in Silko’s *Ceremony*, though in Vizenor’s first novel, *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (originally published in 1978 as *Darkness in St. Louis Bearheart*), the survivors of a journey away from home in a post-apocalyptic America find what might be considered a new home in the ancient Pueblo landscape of New Mexico. In this novel, one of the mixedblood tricksters states, “Going home is real punishment in a mobile world” (Vizenor, 1990: 83). There is, indeed, little interest in Vizenor’s fiction in “going home,” even though his characters might speak lovingly of it. Rather, Vizenor seems interested in articulating how sovereignty might function beyond the geographic limits of tribally occupied land. Such a stance, of course, necessarily opposes tribal nationalists, who are often portrayed in Vizenor’s fiction as limited in their fixation on tribal roots, instead of the post-tribal routes preferred by his more cosmopolitan characters.

In *Bearheart*, for instance, Proude Cedarfair and his wife, Rosina, are forced to leave their “sovereign cedar nation” as a consequence of the collusion of the tribal council and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (15). Over the course of the novel, they traverse an

apocalyptic landscape to complete a pilgrimage to Chaco Canyon in New Mexico – the location of Pueblo Bonito, which Cedarfair has chosen as his new tribal home – and they do so in the company of a wild “circus” that includes, among others, a saint, a bishop, a transsexual, a dog lover (literally), mongrel dogs, and crow clowns. Few of these pilgrims actually complete the journey, and the novel leaves open the question of what kind of nationalism Cedarfair will be able to create in his newfound home, but it will undoubtedly be different than the political nationalism usually articulated by tribal structures of governance – or any nationalism that involves institutionalized tribalism, materially articulated in structures of law and governance, among its criteria. After reaching Pueblo Bonito, Cedarfair transforms himself into a bear – a transformation that symbolizes the kind of change that Vizenor seems to deem necessary for tribal peoples to survive in the world he has described. In his next novel, *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987), Vizenor goes even further (geographically speaking) to articulate how tricksterism might transform a specific social and political landscape.

The Heirs of Columbus (1991) is the novel that most neatly combines Vizenor’s evisceration of tragic racialism with institutional invention, and it also offers his most sustained imagination of a kind of utopian nationalism – one that proceeds, as in Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, from a cosmopolitan patriotism open to all, even genetically, so far as their values are tribal. The novel begins with a mixedblood group living near the headwaters of the Mississippi who claim, as the novel’s title suggests, to be the literal descendants of Christopher Columbus. In fact, by the end of the novel, scientific evidence confirms that Stone Columbus, the leader of the heirs, bears the “genetic signature of his namesake” (Vizenor, 1991: 9). Columbus himself, according to the book, was a “crossblood” whose ancestors were, among other things, Mayan and Jewish; his voyage to the Americas, therefore, is one of return “to his homeland” as he brings “tribal genes back to the New World” (p. 9). Published a year before the Columbus quincentenary, the same year as Silko’s *Almanac*, Vizenor’s book is not only a send-up of the familiar narratives of conquest, but also a limning of notions of heritage and ancestry that circulate through identity discourse.

The novel is not, though, a call to abandon tribal identification. The first half of the novel centers on the attempted recovery of human remains – first of Columbus and then of Pocahontas – by the heirs, so that they may be reburied near the headwaters. Vizenor’s interest in the misappropriation of Native remains has persisted throughout his career, and he designed this novel so as to stage in fiction one of his proposals for remedying this history: a bone court.⁹ In the bone court, the “common rules of evidence were set aside . . . the unusual judicial hearing would depend more on the imagination than on material representation.” In other words, the judge explains, the customs of the court have been altered to “favor tribal consciousness” (p. 65). In the course of this hearing, testimony includes not only the usually verbal recitation of first-hand observation, but also virtual reality projections and laser simulations. Chaine Riel Doumet, a private investigator hired by tribal officials jealous of the heirs, comments at the end of the hearing, “The trickster is discovered in shadow realities, the

best witness with immortal evidence, but the trickster is never owned or consumed in tribal imagination” (p. 87). Here, Vizenor poses the questions that animate the novel: how to assert evidence of tribal continuance, of sovereignty, without becoming trapped in non-tribal notions of ownership and consumption?¹⁰ The trickster may originate in tribal oral traditions, but cannot, Vizenor insists, be “owned or consumed” by any group or structure of governance. The imagination of the trickster, in other words, can only lead to forms of sovereignty that are decidedly post-tribal.

Stone Columbus, in fact, declares, “The notion of sovereignty is not tied to the earth, sovereignty is neither fence nor feathers” (p. 67). And in the second half of the novel, Vizenor articulates what kind of national form such a sovereignty might take. The heirs leave their headwaters home for Point Assinika – located on the western border of North America precisely on the boundary between the state of Washington and Victoria Island, Canada. There, they declare a “sovereign nation” “in the names of our genes and the wild tricksters of liberties” (p. 119). This “nation,” however, bears absolutely none of the apparatus of the modern nation-state, nor does it evince any of the pre-modern nostalgia that Vizenor risks with Cedarfair’s pilgrimage to Pueblo Bonito in *Bearheart*:

The point was claimed by the heirs as a free state with no prisons, no passports, no public schools, no missionaries, no television, and no public taxation; genetic therapies, natural medicine, bingo cards, and entertainment were free to those who came to be healed and those who lived on the point.

(p. 24)

Not only does the new nation in *Heirs* offer bingo, genetic therapy, and citizenship to all who come, Stone and the rest of the heirs develop the technology to implant tribal genetic signatures in those who are not, biologically speaking, of tribal descent. “Germans, at last, could be genetic Sioux, and thousands of coastal blondes bored with being white could become shadow tribes of Hopi, or Chippewa” (p. 162). Vizenor’s phrasing points to the obvious ironies of whites wanting to become Indian, but the significance of Stone’s project is nonetheless serious. “His [Stone’s] point,” according to Chaine Riel, “is to make the world tribal, a universal identity, and return to other values as measures of human worth, such as the dedication to heal rather than steal tribal cultures” (p. 162). This may be Vizenor’s clearest statement of the goals of a cosmopolitan, postnational sovereignty – a sovereignty that manages to remain rooted in tribal values, including humor, healing, and the oral traditions of imagination, without defining membership through division, exclusion, or tragic narratives of victimization. Tellingly, Vizenor’s imagined nation exists outside the boundaries of the United States.

The Heirs of Columbus makes clear why such a nation remains a fiction: not only do genetic therapies such as the ones Vizenor imagines remain imaginary, but a host of forces – including federal and tribal governments – remain aligned against the Point Assinika nation and all for which it stands. We conclude with this image – the image of a Native, trickster, sovereign nation attempting to preserve its existence in the

territorial borderlands – not because it exhausts the imaginative possibilities of anti-colonial resistance that Native American fiction (or even Gerald Vizenor’s fiction) has to offer.¹¹

Rather, we conclude here because the forces that threaten the existence of Point Assinika serve as a reminder of the very real economic and political forces that make the anticolonial project of twenty-first-century American Indians so much of a challenge. Just as there is not full agreement among Native American writers as to the aesthetic form or political content of Native-authored fiction, there remains much disagreement among the indigenous peoples of North America about the right course to pursue in order to secure tribal sovereignty for the century to come. What we have attempted to suggest is that Native American fiction provides a variety of complex responses to a disparity that has both political and artistic consequences: the gap between the global commitment to the right of indigenous peoples for national self-determination, on the one hand, and the continued colonial relationship between the United States and American-Indian tribes, on the other.

NOTES

- 1 A slightly different and much fuller version of this chapter appears in the *Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States since 1945*, edited by Eric Cheyfitz.
- 2 See for example, Cheyfitz, “The Colonial Double Bind: Sovereignty and Civil Rights in Indian Country”, 2003.
- 3 See chapter 2 of Krupat, *The Turn to the Native*.
- 4 Eric Cheyfitz, “The (Post)Colonial Predicament of Native American Studies,” *Interventions* (4): 421, 423, 2002.
- 5 Tribal control over Indian children was finally acknowledged by federal law in 1978 with the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act, which has the primary purpose of establishing guidelines for the adoption of Native children.
- 6 A reader of Hogan’s memoir, *The Woman Who Watches over the World* (2001) will notice some similarities between the violence suffered by Angel and the abuse suffered by Hogan’s own adopted children from their Indian mother. See, in particular, the memoir chapter, “Silence Is My Mother,” pp. 68–112.
- 7 One accessible discussion of such testimony occurs in James Clifford’s well-known chapter on the efforts of the Mashpee Indians to win recognition of their tribal status; see *The Predicament of Culture*, pp. 277–346. See also Claude Denis, *We Are Not You: First Nations and Canadian Modernity*, for a fascinating account of a dispute between two First Nations groups on Vancouver Island in 1988 that had to be adjudicated in Canadian Courts.
- 8 The novel does not explicitly say whether Ama Eaton is being prosecuted under Florida or US law, presumably because the distinction would make little difference to Omishto. However, since the location of the killing seems to be one reason the case is dismissed – “And the place, the reserve, is not their jurisdiction” (p. 143) – it seems likely that Ama Eaton is being tried by a Florida court.
- 9 On this topic, see especially Vizenor’s essay “Bone Courts: The Natural Rights of Tribal Bones,” in *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports*, pp. 62–82. Vizenor’s advocacy of bone courts seems to presage the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Action (NAGPRA), which became law in 1990, presumably while *Heirs of Columbus* was in press. NAGPRA directs

federally-funded agencies and museums to return human remains and artifacts to the appropriate Native American tribes. It also makes provisions for future remains and items found on federal or tribal lands, and enables tribes to request objects housed in museums be returned to them, provided that the objects are deemed crucial to the tribe's "cultural patrimony." The best-known controversy arising from NAGPRA has been over the disposition of the so-called "Kenne-
wick Man," human remains found near the Columbia River in Washington State and claimed as an ancestor by several tribes residing in the area.

10 This question is also a leading subject of Vizenor's essay on "Native Transmotion" in *Fugitive Poses*, pp. 167–99.

11 Notably, in the three novels followed *Heirs* – *Dead Voices* (1992), *Hotline Healers* (1997), and *Chancers* (2000) – Vizenor turned from the community attempting the reimagination of nationalism (as in both *Bearheart* and *Heirs*) to an exploration of the cosmopolitan individual. Vizenor's attention, in other words, has shifted from the posttribal to the postindian. Even more recently, the prolific Vizenor has published *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* (2003), a novel that takes his trickster characters to Japan.

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From Virgin Land to Ground Zero: Interrogating the Mythological Foundations of the Master Fiction of the Homeland Security State

Donald Pease

This chapter constitutes an attempt to interpret the master narrative that has emerged in the wake of the events that took place on September 11, 2001 through a discussion of the consensual fictions it has displaced.¹ Each of the keywords in its title “Virgin Land” and “Ground Zero” refers to a governing metaphor which has anchored the people to a relationship to the national territory. The terms “Virgin Land” and “Ground Zero” are freighted with metaphorical significance and performative force. “Virgin Land” refers to a space that coincided with the nation’s pre-revolutionary origins wherein European settlers’ grounding assumptions about America were inscribed; “Ground Zero” designates the site that emerged into visibility on September 11, 2001 whereon those grounding assumptions were drastically transformed. Whereas the collective representation “Virgin Land” emerged out of scholarship in the field of American Studies; “Ground Zero” was a term of art devised within the realm of statecraft. The narrative organized around the Virgin Land metaphor associated US peoples with the national security state, and it entailed their collective wish to disavow the historical fact of the US forcible dispossession of indigenous peoples from their homelands. The narrative accompanying Ground Zero has linked the people traumatized by the events that took place on 9/11 with a Homeland State which emerged with the loss of the belief in the inviolability of the Virgin Land. In what follows, I shall sketch the genealogy of each of these narrative formations and interrogate the political and cultural implications of this master fiction that has reorganized the US citizenry’s relationship with the land. I shall also briefly speculate on the role that American Studies might play in interrogating this reconfiguration.

The Inauguration of the Bush Settlement

This analysis begins with the assumption that historical and political crises of the magnitude of 9/11 are always accompanied by mythologies that attempt to reconfigure

them within frames of reference that would generate imaginary resolutions to these crises. The myths that accompany historical crises only become historically real when historical actors supply the hypotheses they project about contingent events with cultural significance. As the preserve of the discursive spaces wherein the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the historically factual are mediated and resolved, myths give closure to traumatizing historical events by endowing them with a moral significance. National cultures conserve images of themselves across time by constructing such larger than life myths and transmitting them from one generation to the next. As the structural metaphors containing all the essential elements of a culture's worldview, myths empower writers and policymakers to position historically contingent events within preconstituted frames of reference that would control the public's understanding of their significance.² Richard Slotkin has explained how national myths accomplish this reconfiguration in terms of their power to assimilate historical contingencies to "archetypal patterns of growth and decay, salvation and damnation, death and rebirth."³ As the structural metaphors containing the essential elements of a culture's habits of mind, myths take place in the gap in between a culture's perception of contingent historical events and their assimilation into the nation's collective memory. In supplying the events they retell with timeless cultural value, myths transform these events into processes of traditionalization that render them central components of the culture that they thereby reproduce. It was through their correlation with processes of traditionalization that core myths like "Virgin Land" acquired their powers of cultural persuasion. Their monopolization of the keys to cultural persuasion enables national myths and symbols to regulate a people's thought and behavior. As the harbinger for the invariant core beliefs prerequisite to the reordering of reality, the national mythology supplied the master fictions to which Bush appealed to authorize the state's actions. The mythological tropes – "Virgin Land," "Redeemer Nation," "American Adam," "Nature's Nation," "Errand into the Wilderness" – sedimented within the nation's master narratives supplied the transformational grammar through which state policymakers have shaped and reshaped the national peoples' understanding of political and historical events. The state's powers of governance have depended in part upon its recourse to these master fictions that transmit a normative system of values and beliefs from generation to generation. After they subordinated historical events to these mythological themes, the government's policymakers were empowered to fashion imaginary resolutions of actual historical dilemmas. But the catastrophic events that took place at the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon, and in Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 precipitated a "reality" that the national metanarratives could neither comprehend nor master. In his September 20, 2001 address to the nation, President George W. Bush provided a symbolic reply that inaugurated a symbolic drama that was partly autonomous of the events that called it forth. The address to the nation was designed to lessen the events' traumatizing power through the provision of an imaginary response to a disaster that could not otherwise be assimilated to the preexisting order of things:

On September 11, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941. Americans have known the casualties of war, but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning . . . Americans have known surprise attacks, but never before on thousands of civilians . . . All of this was brought upon us in a single day, and night fell on a different world . . . I will not forget the wound to our country and those who inflicted it . . . Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done.

(George W. Bush, September 20, 2001)

The executive phrases in Bush's address alluded to the foundational myths embedded within the national narrative. These phrases also inaugurated a symbolic drama that would transform the primary integers in the narrative the nation had formerly told itself into terms – "Ground Zero," "Homeland," "Operation Enduring Justice," "Operation Iraqi Freedom" – that authorized the Bush administration's state of emergency. Specifically, the state's symbolic response to 9/11 replaced "Virgin Land" ("Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil") with "Ground Zero" ("Americans have known the casualties of war, but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning") and the "Homeland" ("Americans have known surprise attacks, but never before on thousands of civilians") as the governing metaphors through which to come to terms with the attack. The spectacular military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq which followed Bush's September 20th address were in part designed to accomplish the conversion of these metaphors into historical facts.⁴

When George Bush cited the historically accurate fact that "with the exception of a Sunday in 1941," the United States had not been subject to foreign invasion, he linked the public's belief in the myth of Virgin Land with the historical record. But when he did so, Bush did not supply US publics with historical grounds for the collective belief in Virgin Land. The myth that America was a Virgin Land endowed the historical fact that US soil had never before been subjected to foreign violation with a moral rationale: Virgin Land was inviolate because the American people were innocent. In describing the surprise attack as a "wound to our country," Bush interpreted this violation on mythological as well as historical registers. The wound was directed against the Virgin Land as well as the US people's myth of themselves as radically innocent. The state of emergency Bush erected at Ground Zero was thereafter endowed with the responsibility to defend the Homeland because the foreign violation of Virgin Land had alienated the national people from their imaginary way of inhabiting the nation. This substitution anchored the people to a very different state formation. It also drastically altered the national people's foundational fantasy about their relationship to the national territory, redefining it in terms of the longing of a dislocated population for their lost homeland.

The myth of Virgin Land enabled the American people to believe in their radical innocence because it permitted them to disavow knowledge of the historical fact that the national people took possession of their native land through the forcible

dispossession of native peoples from their homeland. And the US people's belief in their innocence supplied the fact that the US landscape had not been violated with a moral rationale: their native land was inviolate because the American people were innocent.

Bush's speech possessed narrative and performative dimensions that reinterpreted 9/11 as a wound directed against the core national fantasy of the Virgin Land. The symbolic response to the crisis emptied it of its reality and reorganized the master fiction productive of the national peoples' imaginary relations to actual events. The symbolic reply to this catastrophe supplanted it with a symbolic drama that was autonomous of the events that called it forth. After describing how the citizenry had been alienated from the mythology productive of their imaginary relation to the state, Bush linked their generalized sense of alienation with the vulnerability of the Homeland which became the target of the security apparatus. While the Homeland was associated with the geographical dimensions of the nation-state, its security required the state to extend its policing authority to the dimension of the globe. When Bush declared the country "wounded," he interpreted the violation on mythological as well as historical registers. The wound was directed against the Virgin Land as well as US people's myth of itself as radically innocent. The Homeland Security State that Bush erected at Ground Zero was endowed with the responsibility to defend the Homeland because the foreign violation of their Virgin Land had alienated the national people from their imaginary way of inhabiting their native land. But the violation of the land's "virginity" required that Bush bring the event which the public had formerly disavowed – the forcible dispossession of entire national people from their homeland – into spectacular visibility.

9/11: Virgin Land at Ground Zero

The metaphor of Virgin Land condensed a broad range of historically distinct actions – the uprooting, immigration and resettlement of European exiles on a newly "discovered" territorial landmass – and it regulated the meanings that should and that should not be assigned to these actions. At its core, the metaphor of Virgin Land was designed to fulfill Europe's wish to start life afresh by relinquishing history on behalf of the secular dream of the construction of a new Eden. The metaphor gratified European emigrants' need to believe that America was an unpopulated space. The belief that the new world was discovered and settled by the Europeans who emigrated there resulted from the coupling of a shared fantasy with historical amnesia. If the myth of US exceptionalism described the events – the forcible resettlement of indigenous populations, the imperial annexation of Mexican territory – that the state has termed exceptions to its ruling norms, the myth of Virgin Land redescribed these exceptions as lacking a foundation in US history. Virgin Land depopulated the landscape in the imaginary register so that it might be perceived as an unoccupied territory in actuality. The metaphor turned the landscape into a blank page, understood to be the ideal surface

onto which to inscribe the history of the nation's "Manifest Destiny." Virgin Land narratives placed the movement of the national people across the continent in opposition to the savagery attributed to the wilderness as well as the native peoples who figured as indistinguishable from the wilderness, and, later, it fostered an understanding of the campaign of Indian Removal as nature's beneficent choice of the Anglo-American settlers over the native inhabitants for its cultivation.

Overall Virgin Land enabled the American people to replace the fact that the land was already settled by a vast native population with the belief that it was unoccupied. And the substitution of the national fantasy for the historical reality enabled Americans to disavow the resettlement and in some instances the extermination of entire populations. In displacing historical events with the representations through which they became recognizably "American," Virgin Land narratives produced reality as an effect of the imaginary. The fact that this reality could be exposed as unreal did not diminish the control that the national imaginary exerted over the symbolic order; it worked instead to underscore the logic of fetishism as the decisive aspect of its mode of persuasion. US citizens may have known very well that the historical record would not warrant the belief that the colonists who emigrated to America discovered a Virgin Land, but they nevertheless found it expedient to embrace the belief over the historical record. They found it so because the belief that America was a Virgin Land fostered the complementary belief in the radical innocence of the American people.

The belief as well as the disavowal was linked to the historical fact that US civilian populations had not been subject to foreign attack since the war of 1812.⁵ The historical fact of the nation's inviolability associated the belief in a Virgin Land with the desire that US soil would remain forever unviolated by foreign aggression. When this fact was conjoined with the belief that the violation of a native people's homeland took place on foreign soil rather than Virgin Land, the composite named what determined the United States' uniqueness. But the catastrophic events that took place at Ground Zero on September 11, 2001 actualized both of the scenarios which the belief in Virgin Land had been designed to ward off. At Ground Zero, US Virgin Land had not merely been violated by foreign invaders; this violation assumed the form of the forcible dislocation of a settled population. The buildings which had been erected to symbolize the US rise to world dominance were turned into horrific spectacles of the violent removal of occupants from their site of residence.

The transformation of Virgin Land into Ground Zero brought into visibility an inhuman terrain that the national imaginary had been constructed to conceal. While the term Ground Zero was chosen to describe the unimaginable nature of the events that took place on September 11, 2001, the state's association of them with the demand for the securing of the Homeland invested them with an uncanny effect. For when it displaced the metaphor of the Virgin Land, the term Homeland rendered the devastation precipitated at Ground Zero at once utterly unexpected yet weirdly familiar. After they were figured in relation to the Homeland Security Act, the unprecedented events which took place on 9/11 seemed familiar because they recalled the suppressed historical knowledge of the United States's origins in the devastation of native peoples'

homelands. The sites of residence of the Paiutes and the Shoshones had more recently been destroyed as a result of the state's decision to turn their tribal lands into toxic dumps for the disposal of nuclear waste. The events also appeared familiar, as the signifier "Ground Zero" attests, because the unimaginable sight of the crumbling Twin Towers recovered memories of the fire bombings of civilian populations over Dresden and Tokyo as well as the unspeakable aftereffects of the atomic fallout on the inhabitants of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

With the destruction of the fantasy that the nation was founded on Virgin Land, the violence which it covered over swallowed up the entire field of visibility. Ground Zero evoked the specter of the nation-founding violence out of whose exclusion the fantasy of the Virgin Land had been organized. At Ground Zero the fantasy of radical innocence upon which the nation was founded encountered the violence it had formerly concealed.

But according to what myth-logic were the American peoples constrained either to forget or suspend belief in the Indian Removal policies that had effected the violent dispossession of indigenous tribes throughout the preceding 200 years of the nation's history? And how did the myth of Virgin Land connect the belief in the state's power to secure the national peoples against foreign aggression with belief in their radical innocence?

A Brief Genealogy of the Rise and Fall of the Myth of Virgin Land

While the connection between the disavowal of state violence and the construction of the national mythology might seem remote at best, the facilitation of just such a connection was nevertheless a central concern of the founders of the myth-symbol school of American studies. With the notable exception of Henry Nash Smith, the founders of the myth-symbol school of American Literary Studies – R.W.B. Lewis, Leslie Fiedler, Leo Marx – were veterans of World War II. After the war's conclusion, these soldier-critics produced the patriotic fictions in whose name they could retroactively claim to have fought the war. The national myth they created linked their need for an idealized national heritage with the epic narrative through which that idealization was imagined, symbolized, and supplied with characters and events. The myths about the nation the founders of the myth-symbol school invented was at once a narrative about the national heritage in whose name these soldier-critics had fought the war and a screen memory through which they supplanted the recollections of the violent military campaign in which they had participated with the idealized representations of the nation to which they desired to return. But if the myth-symbol school originated out of their need to remove representations of violence from the nation's past, it lost its monopoly at the time of war in Vietnam when the nation's myths and symbols encountered a historical violence it could neither foreclose from recognition nor deny.

The symbolic national tradition that myth-symbol scholars invented enabled the symbolic engineers responsible for the forging of the nation's foreign policy to fashion

imaginary resolutions for the seemingly intractable political dilemmas that confronted Americans throughout the Cold War. The Virgin Land upon which myth-symbol scholars emplotted historical events supplied a screen onto which they projected the national culture's guilts as well as its fears and desires. Positioned outside the normative control of the social order, this counterworld replaced the vexing facts of the real world with invented characters and events that were compatible with collective social hopes and prejudices.

The idealized representations invented by the founders of the myth-symbol school of interpretation came to name, that is, entitle, the mastertexts of the field of American Literary Studies. These masterworks engaged a prototypical American self (American Adam), in an epic quest (*Errand into the Wilderness*), to liberate our native land (Virgin Land) from foreign encroachments (*The Machine in the Garden*).⁶ While each of these foundational texts provided a slightly different accounts of the metanarrative that defined the practices of Americanists, all of them presupposed a utopian space of pure possibility where a whole self internalized this epic myth in a language and a series of actions that corroborated American exceptionalism.

Scholars working within the myth-symbol school correlated the scholarly prerogatives of American studies with the formative values of US society. In combining rigorous research with patriotic sentiment, the members of this scholarly community turned nation-centeredness into a professional ideal. As prevalued representations of reality, the myths that they interpreted within this school did not merely codify national metanarrative. The superstructural pressure of national metanarrative transmitted an implied regulating intertext that was present at the level of the discourse in the same way that grammar is present at the level of the sentence. This regulatory intertext eliminated any distinction between what the metanarrative meant to say (its rhetoric) and what it was constrained to mean (its grammar).

As coherent structures of belief, these myths and symbols constituted what might be described as objective imperatives that brought historical events into conformity with the nation's pre-existing self-representations. Their myths and symbols measured events against their impact on the cohesion of the national community, and created identifiable enemy images against whom to rally. Finally they suggested a range of moralistic lessons derived from past disasters, about how to act in the present so as to safeguard a future. In so doing they also supplied policymakers and speechwriters with the rhetoric and the grammar through which they forged the addresses that won the people's consent. Following its deployment as the grounding mythos for pedagogy in American Studies, the US metanarrative these critics invented thereafter solidified into a relatively autonomous system of meaning production that resulted in a semantic field by which individuals were persuaded to live demonstrably imaginary relations to their real conditions of existence. Each of the foundational signifiers – "Virgin Land," "American Adam," "Errand into the Wilderness" – sedimented within the national metanarrative possessed a performative dimension empowered to bring about belief in the truth of the state of affairs they represented.

Because it involved a universal subject in a transhistorical action, Kenneth Burke has characterized the metanarrative as the “justifying myth” for the material history of the Cold War.

An explanatory narrative that achieves the status of perfecting myth serves to reconcile discrepancies and irrationalities while appearing to obviate public or official scrutiny of actual circumstances. Such a narrative becomes effectively monolithic and saturating, demonizing its opposite and canceling or absorbing all mediatory and intermediate terms and kinds of activity.⁷

(Carmichel, 1993: 7)

At once a mode of inquiry, an object of knowledge, and an ideological rationale, the myth-symbol school of American Literary Studies facilitated an interdisciplinary formation that empowered Americanist scholars within the disciplines of literature, history, politics, sociology and government to interpret and regulate the United States’ geopolitical order. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the field of American Studies collaborated with the press, university system, publishing industry, and other aspects of the cultural apparatus that managed the semantic field and policed the significance of such value-laden terms as the nation and the people.⁸

When Henry Nash Smith published *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, he analyzed the myths that were generated by the European settlers in their historical encounter with the American West. After comparing these myths with collective representations of the New World that were formulated at the time of the “discovery” of America, Smith explained how this primary metaphor provided a means of spiritual, economic and masculine renewal for the “sons of Cooper’s Leatherstocking” who embraced the myth. In 1950, the year of the book’s publication, the United States was engaged in a struggle with Soviet communism over the political disposition of peoples across the globe. Because it was understood to be an expression of the sovereign will of the people that it was also made to represent, the myth of Virgin Land was invoked by policymakers as a representation of the public’s approval of the state’s policy of rebuilding and developing nations across the planet. After the architects of the Marshall Plan and the New Frontier deployed concepts and themes from this metanarrative to secure spontaneous consent for state policies, the myth of Virgin Land enabled postwar political leaders to legitimate the United States’ place as the subject and telos of universal history.

Throughout the Cold War, US foreign policy was grounded in the credo of American exceptionalism that required the belief in the United States as a unique political formation. The Cold War state was grounded in a political metaphysics that elevated national security into the foundational national predicate. The metanarrative underpinning the myth of Virgin Land transmitted a national tradition in support of this predication. And during the first three decades of the Cold War, Henry Nash Smith’s Virgin Land hypothesis supplied the cultural code through which normative Americanist behavior was communicated and regulated. When Smith defined Virgin

Land as open national landscape that fostered the construction and realization of self-reliant individualists, he supplied the terrain upon which state policymakers displaced actually existing social and political crises onto a strictly imaginary site where they underwent symbolic resolution. The rugged individualists who populated this trans-historical terrain subjectivized the codes regulating appropriate American behavior, and they thereby legitimated the norms suturing US citizens to the patterns of domination, subjectification, and governmentality that the national security state propagated across the globe.

However, the events that took place during the Vietnam War radically disrupted the historical effectiveness of the metanarrative of Virgin Land that had formerly endowed historical events with their intelligibility. Opponents to the war in Vietnam correlated the state's policy of Indian Removal in the nineteenth century with the foreign policy that resulted in the massacres at My Lai. In so doing anti-war activists exposed the myth of Virgin Land as one of the ideological forms through which state historians and policymakers had covered up the nation's shameful history of colonial violence. The war effected what John Hellmann has described as a radical disruption in the nation's self-representations:

When the story of America in Vietnam turned into something unexpected, the nature of the larger story of America itself became the subject of intense cultural dispute. On the deepest level, the legacy of Vietnam is the disruption of our story of our explanation of the past and vision of the future.⁹

In the wake of the Vietnam War, Americanist scholars desacralized the myths of the United States as a Virgin Land and the myth of the national history as a providential errand into the wilderness. They fostered a new paradigm of communities that replaced essentializing national myths with cultural constructivist models, that undermined the aesthetic authority of the national landscape and that subverted the literary canon as an instrument of Americanization, and that imagined forms of citizenship that were not subject to the imperatives of the security apparatus.

The Return of the National Mythology and the Emergence of the Global Homeland State

War might be said to begin when a country becomes a patriotic fiction for its population. A nation is not only a piece of land but a narration about the people's relation to the land.¹⁰ And after 9/11, the national myths that had undergone wholesale debunking in the post-Vietnam era underwent remarkable regeneration. Around the time that the US war machine was rolling into the area some biblical scholars have designated as the location of the Garden of Eden, Alan Wolfe published a lengthy review essay in *The New Republic* in which he argued that it was the ethical responsibility of Americanist scholars to rehabilitate the narrative of Virgin Land that had been fostered by the

scholars in the myth-symbol school of American Studies. In the opening paragraphs of his article, Wolfe invoked Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* as an authorization for the following characterization of the deleterious consequences of revisionist Americanists' loss of belief in these core narratives: "It does not occur to these revolutionaries that the groups they hope will conquer America cannot do so if there is no America to conquer. Let America die, and all who aspire to its perfection will die with it."¹¹

If one of the primary aims of war involves destroying the way an enemy perceives itself, Alan Wolfe represented 9/11 as an act of war in the sense that it brought about the destruction of the national people's foundational fantasy concerning their relation to the land. The foundational fantasy of the United States was organized around a traumatic element that could not be symbolized within the terms of the national narrative. In the United States, the fantasy of the Virgin Land covered over the shameful history of internal violence directed against the native populations. But as we have seen, this historical fact was not utterly effaced. It functioned as an occluded supplement to the nation's view of itself as a Redeemer Nation whose Manifest Destiny entailed undertaking a providential errand into the wilderness. The disavowed knowledge of the barbarous violence that accompanied this "civilizing" mission was the unwritten basis for Alan Wolfe's need to embrace Virgin Land as a representative national metaphor.

But George Bush differed from Alan Wolfe in that he turned the enemy's violation of the nation's foundational fantasy into the occasion to fashion exceptions to the rules of law and war, which formally inaugurated a state of emergency. In his September 20th address, Bush designated the "enemies of freedom" as the historical agency responsible for this generalized unsettlement of the national people. But neither Osama bin Laden nor Sadaam Hussein was the causative agent responsible for the forcible separation of the national people from their way of life. It was the state of emergency which ensued in the wake of the Homeland Security Act which required the people to depart from the norms and values to which they had become habituated, and that tore to the ground the democratic institutions – freedom of speech, religious tolerance, formal equality, uniform juridical procedures, universal suffrage – that had formerly nurtured and sustained the national people.

With the enemy's violation of the rules of war as rationale, the state suspended the rules to which it was otherwise subject, and violated its own rules in the name of protecting them against a force that operated according to different rules. In order to protect the rule of law as such from this illegality, the state declared itself the occupant of a position that was not subject to the rules it must protect. The Congress's passage of the USA Patriot (Proved Appropriate Tools to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) Act into law effected the most dramatic abridgment of civil liberties in the nation's history. This emergency legislation subordinated all concerns of ethics, of human rights, of due process, of constitutional hierarchies, and of the division of power to the state's monopoly over the exception.

The emergency state is marked by absolute independence from any juridical control and any reference to the normal political order. It is empowered to suspend the articles of the constitution protective of personal liberty, freedom of speech and assembly and

the inviolability of the home and postal and telephone and internet privacy. In designating Afghanistan and Iraq as endangering the Homeland, Operations Enduring Justice and Iraqi Freedom simply extended the imperatives of the domestic emergency state across the globe.

Following 9/11 the state effected the transition from a normalized political order to a state of emergency by enacting the violence that Virgin Land had normatively covered over. Whereas 9/11 dislocated the national people from the mythology productive of their imaginary relation to the state, Bush linked their generalized dislocation with the vulnerability of the Homeland, which thereafter became the target of the security apparatus. Bush endowed the state of emergency which he erected at Ground Zero with the responsibility to defend the Homeland because foreign aggressors had violated Virgin Land. The violation of the land's inviolability not only disinhibited the state of its need to mask its history of violence; this act of aggression also required the state to bring the event which the public had formerly disavowed – the forcible dispossession of national peoples from their homelands – into spectacular visibility.

But the Homeland which emerged as the justification for the state's exercise of excessive violence was not identical with the land mass of the continental United States. The Homeland Bush invoked to "authorize" these emergency actions did not designate either an enclosed territory or an imaginable home. The Homeland secured by the emergency state instead referred to the unlocatable order that emerged through and by way of the people's generalized dislocation from the nation as a shared form of life. The Homeland Security Act put into place a state of exception that positioned the people in a space that was included in the Homeland through its exclusion from the normal political order. As the relationship between the state and the population that comes into existence when the state declares a state of emergency, the Homeland names a form of governmentality without a recognizable location. As the unlocalizable space the population is ordered to occupy when the state enters the site of the exception to the normative order, the Homeland names the structure through which a state of emergency is realized normally.

As we have seen, the national mythology turned the nation into a stage for the enactment of particular forms of life. But if the nation designates the arena in which the national peoples enacted these ways of life, the Homeland named the space which emerged when these peoples were dissociated from their ways of life. The introduction of the signifier of the Homeland to capture this experience of generalized dislocation recalled themes from the national narrative which it significantly altered. But insofar as these themes were antithetical to the range of connotations sedimented within Virgin Land, the historical antecedents for the Homeland surely must give pause.

The Homeland named the site that the colonial settlers had abandoned in their quest for a newly found land. The Homeland also named the country to which the settlers might one day return. In its reference to an archaic land from which the colonial settlers either voluntarily departed or were forced to abandon, the Homeland represented a prehistoric pastness prior to the founding of the United States. Following 9/11, the Homeland named the space in which the people were included after acts of

terrorism had violently dislocated them from their ways of life. The metaphor of the Homeland thereafter evoked the image of a vulnerable population that had become internally estranged from its "country of origin" and dependent upon the protection of the state. When it was figured within the Homeland Security Act, the Homeland engendered an imaginary scenario wherein the national people were encouraged to consider themselves dislocated from their country of origin by foreign aggressors so that they might experience their return from exile in the displaced form of the spectacular unsettling of homelands elsewhere. This imaginary scenario and the spectacles through which it was communicated sustained the dissociation of the people from recognizably "American" ways of life. Insofar as the Homeland named what emerged when the population became dislocated from the conditions of belonging to a territorialized nation, its security required the domestic emergency state to extend its policing authority to the dimension of the globe.

Virgin Land as Ground Zero

The Homeland Security Act regressed the population to a minority condition of dependency upon the state for its biopolitical welfare. But the state thereafter correlated this regression in political standing with the reenactment of a formerly suppressed historical event. After the people were regressed to the condition of a political minority, the state produced a series of spectacles which returned the population to the historical moment in which colonial settlers had deployed the illicit use of force against native populations. With the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the figurative meanings associated with Virgin Land were demetaphorized into the actuality of the state's violence. The state's spectacular violation of the rights of the "enemies of freedom" was thereby made to coincide with the emergency state's radical abridgment of the domestic people's civil rights. The putative insecurity of the homeland's civilian population and the threat of terrorist attack were co-constituting aspects of the Homeland Security State. The state's representation of a vulnerable civilian population in need of the protection of the state was fashioned in a relation of opposition to the captured Taliban and Iraqis who were subjected to the power of the state yet lacked the protection of their rights or liberties.

This new settlement required the public to sacrifice their civil liberties in exchange for the enjoyment of the state's spectacular violations of the rights of other sovereign states. For the Bush administration did not exactly represent the military operations that took place in Afghanistan and Iraq as wars conducted between civilized states that respected one another's sovereignty. It constructed them as confrontations between the emergency state apparatus and terrorizing powers that posed a threat to the Homeland. If the modern state is construed as the embodiment of Enlightenment Reason, and the neoliberal principles of market democracy comprise the means whereby this rationality becomes universalized, neither the Taliban regime in Afghanistan nor the Baathist regime in Iraq could be construed as either modern states or as rational actors

in the global economy. In their military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US emergency state apparatus imposed this modern state formation and that market logic on the Afghani and the Iraqi peoples. As a result of these acts of “defensive aggression,” Iraq and Afghanistan were relocated within the global order of the Homeland Security State.

The spectators’s enjoyment of them derived from the spectacles’ violation of the normative assumptions – that the United States was a redeemer nation rather than an aggressor state, whose manifest errand was civilizing rather than brutalizing, etc. etc. – sedimented within the national imaginary. Because the spectators could not enjoy the state’s spectacles without disassociating from the assumptions that would have rendered them unimaginable as American spectacles, these spectacles enforced the separation of the state’s spectatorial publics from their national forms of life. After these spectacles intermediated between the people and their forms of life, they substituted the lateral linkages with the emergency state apparatus for the people’s vertical integration with a democratic way of life.

In Iraq and Afghanistan the emergency forces of the state openly reperformed the acts of violence that the myth of Virgin Land had formerly covered up. “Operation Infinite Justice” quite literally depopulated the Afghani landscape so that it might be perceived as a blank page onto which to inscribe a different political order. Operation Iraqi Freedom fostered an understanding of “regime change” as the Iraqi people’s beneficent choice of the political exempla of its Anglo-American occupiers for the institutions of its new political order. As witnesses to the state’s colonization of Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States’ spectatorial publics were returned to the prehistoric time of the colonial settlers who had formerly spoliated Indian homelands. By way of Operation Infinite Justice and Operation Iraqi Freedom the Homeland Security State restaged the colonial settlers’ conquest of Indians and the acquisition of their homelands. The terror and the killing became the Homeland State’s means of accomplishing anew the already known telos of US history as the inaugural event of America’s global rule in the twenty-first century. These spectacles redescribed imperial conquest as a form of domestic defense in a manner that reversed the relationship between the aggressor and the victim. The Homeland Security State constructed the preemptive strikes against others homelands as a spectacular form of domestic defense against foreign aggression. Both spectacles invited their audiences to take scopic pleasure in the return of the traumatic memory of the unprovoked aggression that the colonial settlers had previously exerted against native populations. These massacres, which could not be authorized or legitimated by the Virgin Land narrative, became the foundational acts which inaugurated the Global Homeland as a realm outside the law.

Whereas the myth of Virgin Land produced historical continuity by suppressing the traumatic memory of lawless violence, the events of 9/11 demanded the recovery of this traumatic memory so as to reverse the national people’s relation to violence and to inaugurate a new global order. The spectacles which unfolded in the deserts of Afghanistan and Iraq transformed the US spectatorial population into the perpetrators rather than the victims of foreign aggression. The state’s literal recovery of the

traumatic memory of barbarous aggression against native peoples thereby overcame the traumatizing experience of aggression at the hands of “foreign” terrorists.

These spectacles of violence encouraged the public’s belief that it participated in the state’s power because it shared in the spectacle through which the state gave expression to its power. But the people were also the potential targets of the shows of force they witnessed. In transforming the citizens into spectators, the state interposed a disjunction between the people and the ways of life that the state protected through its exercises of retributive violence. After this new settlement induced the people to suspend their civil liberties in exchange for the enjoyment of the state’s spectacular violations of the rights of its enemies, the emergency state transposed the nation and the citizen into dispensable predicates of global rule.

Homeland Security as a Global Biopolitical Settlement

As we have seen, the Homeland enacted into law by the Homeland Security Act did not have reference to an enclosed territory. And it was not exactly a political order. The Homeland Security Act was the political instrument on whose authority the State transformed a temporary suspension of order erected on the basis of factual danger into a quasi-permanent biopolitical arrangement which as such remained outside the normal order. After the passage of the Homeland Security Act, the state of exception no longer referred to an external state of factual danger and was instead identified with the juridico-political order itself. This juridical political apparatus thereafter authorized a biopolitical settlement which inscribed the body of the people into an order of state power which endowed the state with power over the life and death of the population.¹² This biopolitical sphere emerged with the state’s decision to construe the populations it governed as indistinguishable from unprotected biological life. The body of the people as a free and equal citizenry which was endowed with the capacity to reconstitute itself through recourse to historically venerated social significations was thereby replaced by a biologized population that the state protected from biological terrorism.

The biopolitical sphere constructed by the provisions of the Homeland Security Act first subtracted the population from the forms of civic and political life through which they recognized themselves as a national people and then positioned these life forms – the people, their way of life – into non-synchronous zones of protection with the promise that their future synchronization would resuscitate the nation-state. After undergoing a generalized dislocation from the national imaginary through which their everyday practices were lived as recognizably “American” forms of life, the national peoples were reconstituted as a biological life forms. Their dislocation from the national imaginary resulted in their mass denationalization. As naked biological life under the state’s protection, the biopoliticized population also could play no active political role in the Homeland State’s re-ordering of things. The Homeland State thereafter represented the population as an unprotected biological formation whose collective

vitality must be administered and safeguarded against weapons of biological terrorism. But insofar as the Homeland State's biopolitical imperative to regulate the life and death of the population that it governed was irreducible to the denizens of the nation-state, the Homeland State's biopolitical regime became potentially global in its extensibility.

It was the state's description of the weapons which endanger the aggregated population as "biological" that in part authorized the state's biopolitical settlement. In representing its biopolitical imperatives in terms of a defense against weapons of biological destruction, the state also produced an indistinction between politics and the war against terrorism. This redescription produced two interrelated effects: it transformed the population's political and civil liberties into life forms that were to be safeguarded rather than acted upon. More importantly, it turned political opponents of this biopolitical settlement into potential enemies of the ways of life that the state safeguards.¹³

Afterword: the Part of No Part

Overall, 9/11 brought to the light of day the Other to the normative representation of the United States. It positioned unheimlich dislocatees within the homeland in place of the citizens who exercised rights and liberties on the basis of these normalizations. When the signifier of the Homeland substituted for the Virgin Land, the national security state was supplanted by the emergency state. Whereas Virgin Land enforced the disavowal of the state's destruction of indigenous populations' homelands, Ground Zero demanded that spectacle of the destruction of a homeland as compensation for the loss of the land's "virginity." In tracking the radical shift in the governing frames of reference, I have indicated the ways in which the state coordinated the signifiers "9/11," "Ground Zero," and "Homeland" into a relay of significations undergirding the biopolitical settlement of the Global Homeland State. But in recollecting the radical shift in the nation's relationship to its master fictions that took place during the Vietnam War, I have also alluded to the inherent instability of the nodal points that have been constructed to coordinate these newly invented governing representations.

When he inaugurated the prerogatives of the emergency state at Ground Zero, Bush conscripted the traumatic power of the events that took place there to offer preemptive strikes as compensation for the loss. But the events that took place on September 11, 2001 fractured the nation state's continuist time. As the locus for events lacking a pre-existing signification in the social order, 9/11 exists as a sign of what cannot take place within the order of signification. But if it marks the rupture of the time kept by the nation-state, 9/11 is no less discordant with the mode of historical eventuation the Bush administration has inaugurated in its name. Inherently nonsynchronous, 9/11 calls for a time to come.

The Bush administration attempted to supplant the loss of the belief in Virgin Land that underwrote the myth of US exceptionalism with the arrogation of the power to occupy the position of the exception to the laws of the World of Nations.

But insofar as the Homeland State's exceptions to the rules of law and war are themselves instantiations of force that lack the grounding support of norms or rules, they resemble the traumatic events upon which they depend for their power to rule. As such, these exceptions will maintain their power to rule only as long as US publics remain captivated by the spectacles of violence the state has erected at the site of Ground Zero. If the global Homeland has erected an order in which the people have no part, that order has positioned the people in a place that lacks a part in the global order. As the surplus element in the Global Homeland, the people also occupy the place of an empty universal. This place may presently lack any part to play in the Homeland's global order. But the very emptiness of this space, the fact that it demarcates the peoples of the Global Homeland included but with no part to play in the existing order simultaneously empowers the people to play the part of articulating an alternative to the existing order. Because the people are without a part in the order in which the people are nevertheless included, they also constitute a part in an alternative to that order. The part without a part¹⁴ in the given global order constitutes an empty universal in an order to come that the global peoples can particularize differently.¹⁵

That order to come will not begin until the global state of emergency state is itself exposed as the cause of the traumas it purports to oppose.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter builds upon but also significantly revises the afterword which I contributed to the 2003 Duke University Press volume *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11*, edited by Stanley Hauerwaas and Frank Lentricchia.
- 2 Henry Nash Smith supplied an insight into the mobilizing effects of these collective representations on the US populations throughout history when he observed: "These illustrations point to the conclusion that history cannot happen – that is, men cannot engage in purposive group behavior – without images which simultaneously express collective desires and impulses and impose coherence on the infinitely varied data of experience. These images are never, of course, exact reproductions of the physical and social environment. They cannot motivate and direct action unless they are drastic simplifications." Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West in Symbols and Myth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950, p. ix. But the historian William H. McNeill provided the most cogent description of the role myths played in the articulation of state governance policies in a 1981 article that he published *Foreign Affairs* (61): 1–13, 1981, entitled "The Care and Repair of Public Myth." In that article, McNeill argued the indispensable role that myths and symbols played in the manufacturing of the public's consent for domestic and foreign policy. And he admonished revisionist scholars for what the propagation of their demythologizing proclivities produces: "A people without a full quiver of relevant agreed upon statements, accepted in advance through education or less formalized acculturation finds itself in deep trouble, for, in the absence of believable myths, coherent public action becomes difficult to improvise or sustain."
- 3 Richard Slotkin, "Myth and the Production of History," in Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (eds.), *Ideology and Classic American Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 70.

- 4 I first began to think of the biopolitical settlement that the Bush administration had constructed out of the relay of signifiers it installed in between 9/11 and the Homeland Security State while I listened to Amy Kaplan deliver a talk at the Dartmouth American Studies Institute in June of 2002 in which she ruminated over the connotations of the terms "Ground Zero," "Homeland" and "Guantanamo Bay." Amy Kaplan has since published those remarks in *Radical History Review*. My indebtedness to as well as my divergences from Kaplan's meditation can be discerned from a reading of "Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space" in *Radical History Review* 85 (winter 2003): 82–93.
- 5 When George Bush observed that "Americans have known wars, but for the past 136 years they have been wars on foreign soil," he referenced the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865 as the historical benchmark for the figure of 136 years. But the last occasion on which the country was subject to "foreign attack" was the war of 1812, which took place 189 years earlier. In recalling the Civil War rather than the War of 1812 as the historical precedent for 9/11, Bush also wanted to invoke the South as the symbolic geography that he wished primarily to represent in his "crusade" against world evil.
- 6 R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955; Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1956; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West in Symbols and Myth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- 7 In *Framing History: The Rosenberg Story and the Cold War*, Virginia Carmichel has supplied the following elaboration of Kenneth Burke's notion of a justifying myth as "An explanatory narrative that achieves the status of perfecting myth which serves to reconcile discrepancies and irrationalities while appearing to obviate public or official scrutiny of actual circumstances. Such a narrative becomes effectively monolithic and saturating, demonizing its opposite and canceling or absorbing all mediatory and intermediate terms and kinds of activity."
- 8 Robyn Wiegman and I have elaborated upon the the myth-symbol school as an aesthetic ideology of the centralizing postwar state in the "Introduction" to *Futures of American Studies*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. Although I have replicated some of the major claims of that essay, a more nuanced discussion of this dynamic can be found on pp. 16–21 of the "Introduction" to *The Futures of American Studies*.
- 9 John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. x.
- 10 My understanding of the fantasy structure of war draws upon Renata Salecl's discussion of this topic in *Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism*, New York: Routledge, 1994, especially pp. 15–19.
- 11 Alan Wolfe, "Anti-American Studies," *The New Republic*, February 10, 2003, p. 25.
- 12 My discussion of the biopolitical settlement, as well as my understanding of the state of emergency and the space of the exception, is indebted to Giorgio Agamben's remarkable discussion of the relationship between forms of life and biopolitics in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- 13 Agamben examines the transformation of politics into biopolitics through a reconsideration of Foucault's account of this mutation in the essay "Form-of-life," *Means without End*, pp. 3–14.
- 14 Jacques Ranciere elaborates upon the importance of the phrase "the part of no part" to political contestations in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 1–60.
- 15 My understanding of the empty or singular universal draws upon Slavoj Žižek's discussion of this concept in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology*, New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 187–239.

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Afterword

Paul Lauter

The situation of an editor of a book like this is rather like that of a coach of a football team: you work out your game plan, select your players, explain to them what roles you would like them to play – and then you frantically run up and down the sidelines as they do their thing. It seldom comes out just as you had imagined, which is at once the frustration and joy of this work.

In this instance, for example, I might have liked more about Poe, about how his work was taken up by *symboliste* poets in France and, in a certain sense, was returned to American letters in the modernist era as something rich and strange. I'd have liked to see a comparison between his fiction and that of Alice Cary, whose wonderful story *Uncle Christopher's* reveals striking parallels to – as well as instructive differences from – Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*: dream visions wherein the narrators are trapped in deadly, neurasthenic households.

I might have liked to see more about how a story like Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* registers a strongly feminist view of unequal relationships – contra his earlier reputation for unreconstructed macho values. I might have liked someone to consider the generally unsung verse of the “Star-Spangled Banner” that reads as follows:

O! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: “In God is our trust.”
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

How interestingly that language speaks to the aftermath of September 11, 2001, as well as to the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize.

But these were paths not taken. The paths taken, often those less traveled, have I hope delighted and instructed you, our reader and companion. We should be pleased to know. And so I conclude with an invitation to participate in the intellectual community which has over the last 30 years been engaged in the project of “Reconstructing American Literature.” Please feel free to contact us: <paul.lauter@trincoll.edu> and <emma.bennett@wiley.com> or to find your own ways of joining our work of freshly considering the field of study we call “American literature and culture.”

Paul Lauter

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