REVIEWS

Tadeusz Sławek. *Henry David Thoreau—Grasping the Community of the World*. Trans. from the Polish by Jean Ward. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014. 316 pages.

Some books can be read in a single sitting. Others seem more suited to a browsing, the way one wanders through an art gallery looking for a moment at this painting and that one, pausing a bit longer before one that captures our eye, but then moving on. Yet others belong to that rare and precious sort that invite the reader into a long and lingering relationship. These seem to *desire us*, their words revealing something essential to us, stirring the mind and activating the heart. This book belongs to this latter group. In a manner at once stylistically enticing and intellectually engaging, its author invites us to enter into a vigorous conversation that matters—with philosophers and writers, artists and intellectuals whom he has gathered in a dialogue at once critical and constructive, engaging a wide cultural spectrum of voices that ranges across the sweep of the intellectual heritage of the West from antiquity to postmodernity. And, if this work gives voice to a vigorous and sustained argument about political philosophy, it does so with a keen eye to the pragmatics of human existence—and always with reference to the *non-human* as the inviolable basis for such a discussion.

Such a book as this addresses us not at the register of the mind's curiosity alone, with its insatiable thirst for compelling ideas, but rather in that deeper reach of inquiry where the urgencies of thought and life come together and compel us to be alert—for here we sense that nothing less than the world's fate, and perhaps that of our very souls, is at stake. Professor Sławek takes us on what Thoreau would have called a "saunter," a long and unhurried journey which in this case takes us not across the meadows and woods near Concord, Massachusetts, where Thoreau spent the entirety of his life, but rather into the deep recesses of cultural analysis and existential inquiry. The author invites us to follow "trails" he has blazed into the thickets and clearings of political theory and philosophical discourse, all for the sake of what he calls "the community of the world." His project is an urgent one, and one senses this in the prose: the thrust of this book is not simply that of "deconstruct[ing] the consciousness of Western man" as he puts it citing Nietzsche, one of his favored interlocutors, but also that of helping us "learn to calibrate [our] gaze differently, so that the aesthetic experience [of gazing] allows [us] to make a critical assessment of the practices of the economic politics of ownership" (248–250). Under the shaping force of such intentions, this book is an "essay," in the

British sense. But, more than this, it is an intellectual, cultural, and political manifesto for our times. As Kant—drawing on Horace—would remind us, *Sapere aude!*

Thus, a warning at the outset: this is a book that will interrupt your plans to devote yourself to other duties, at least for those whose intellectual and aesthetic appetite depends on things of substance and refuses the thin gruel that fills the surplus of books being published in our time. Here, in a style of thinking that depends on a deliberate and prolonged meandering or—as Thoreau would have it, a proper *sauntering*—among the byways of the mind and heart, we find ourselves in the hands of a writer who refuses the compartmentalizations of the modern academy: those he has gathered at this symposium are there because they, too, are restless in their hunger to engage life at the places of real presence, to probe the surfaces in the search for the depths.

The form of this volume by Tadeusz Sławek, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Silesia (Katowice, Poland), is appropriately not linear, not a protracted argument in a single direction. It is rather a conversation that wanders, that refuses to hurry, inviting us to overhear Mr. Sławek in the ways he negotiates the broad river of western culture, wandering along its main artery on its way to the sea, but diverging all along the way to follow its tributaries upstream to distant origins often ignored by the hurried traveler, discovering many of the varied sources that contribute to this river's relentless and determined flow. It is a book that is part philosophical argument and part cultural criticism, part witness to the fragile beauty of this life and part invitation to enter into the thoughts and discoveries, the insights and feelings that make up what St. Benedict knew as *conversatio,* which in the usage of Late Antiquity suggested a "way of life" and not simply an exchange of words. Above all, this book is a poetic summons, not on the surfaces of its words but in the play of their depths.

Fortunately for English readers, at least those for whom the literature of Poland remains a sealed book, Mr. Sławek was fortunate to have secured the services of Dr. Jean Ward (Associate Professor of English Literature at the Institute of English and American Studies of Gdańsk University) as translator, who has rendered admirable service in bringing this volume to us in a form commensurate with that of the original—viz., at once intellectually precise and stylistically fluid. Professor Ward's voicing of this volume, true to the original, does not declare but rather gives voice to the lyric movement in Mr. Sławek's prose. The result is a book written in a style that is both daring in intellectual scope and alluring in its poetic texture. Both dimensions come through in Ms. Ward's effective and elegant translation, which, true to the dictates of translation, is as much an art as it is technical science, one that depends on intuition and intimations of language alongside lexical precision to the demands of diction and voice. It should be noted that this labor involved the arduous work of locating all the original citations from Thoreau and other English-language authors in English, alongside the normal demands such translation entails, in itself no mean feat. Her work on this volume throughout is as sensitive and perceptive as is her altogether stunning English translation of Professor

Sławek's poetic portrait of William Blake, a piece of "performance art" that gives voice to the poet's conviction that "art can never exist without naked beauty displayed" (for one "movement" from this longer work, "Nativity on Poland Street," see *Spiritus* 14 [2014]: 109; the original is entitled *Drzewo aniołów. Esej na głos i kontrabas* [*Tree of the Angels. An Essay for Voice and Double Bass*]).

The attempt to write a review of such a remarkable work as this is complicated by the subtlety and, indeed, the urgency of the argument—or arguments, as this is not a linear text but rather one that circles and probes, an instance that takes seriously Thoreau's own worry when he wondered, "What sort of science is that which enriches the understanding, but robs the imagination?" (21). In form, Mr. Sławek writes in answer to this query, shaping his volume as a series of journal entries which thus mimic the published edition of the journals of Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). The first long entry tells the story of his purchase of this work in a secondhand bookshop in Concord, Massachusetts. I happen to know this little shop, "Books with a Past," having also ambled down these streets as Prof. Sławek had—and, more to the point, as Thoreau himself would have done countless times during his life. In this opening discussion, laden with digressions, the author tells the story of acquiring this set, the green-bound edition of 1904 that had been owned by a man named Elliot Allison. Here, the wandering begins, as Mr. Sławek traces his own pursuit to find out who this man was and how Allison's marginal handwritten notes suggest illumine something distinctive about the demands and delights of Thoreau's work. We might well characterize Mr. Sławek's style as meditative, a kind of persistent rumination on things he notices—in Thoreau's journal, in Allison's terse notes, in the natural world at large, and in the wide array of voices that carry our cultural heritage across the ages, from the pre-Socratics to the present.

At the heart of this penetrating book is a determined commitment to foster what Mr. Sławek calls "the community of the world," or what Thoreau himself refers to as "the elevation of mankind." What he means by this is a commitment to contribute something essential to the restless human longing for an authentic and even redemptive "participation" in the reality of which we are each a constitutive part, and to spur us to deeper and more authentic commitment to the non-human as the surest redemption—i.e., releasing or restoring—of the human. One of the joys in this volume is the wide sampling of Thoreau's entries from his *Journals*, a reminder of Thoreau's capacity to observe things around him carefully and thoughtfully, with a sharp and persistent attentiveness to what was "at hand." These short quotations often provide a point of engagement with other thinkers in a wide spectrum, from Antiquity to a wide sampling of later writers—Thoreau's contemporary and friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, of course, and a rich chorus of others who came later. In commenting on Thoreau's journal entries in a way that rehearses this sometimes unexpected meeting of voices, a cluster of themes provide the shaping focus for Prof. Sławek's discussion.

Among these I would point to the following as essential in what strikes me as a consummate intellectual "performance": first, the importance of "un-self-sufficing," a neologism he coins, pointing to that sense of belonging-to or participating-in the larger whole in a manner that carries the possibility of discovering or re-forming genuine "community"; the value of "bare existence" as the deepest, primal substratum that forms the root of our existence, an essential and free root "not subject to the order of law or the structures of institutions" which "enables us to experience the essential companionship with the world"; his notion of "*zoe*graphy" (a clever neologism inspired by William Blake), pointing to what he calls the "stillness audible" of the world; imagination as the most essential ingredient required for the "revolution of perception," as Mr. Sławek thinks of it, because this alone enables us "not to leave reality behind, but to penetrate its matter to the depths"; the requirement that the mind be re-formed in order to "re-model the world" and avoid being subjected to the often willful and perverse pressures of "institutions" which, of their very nature, often threaten to "close" life to what he points to as "the strange, the wild and the unknown"; the danger of the reductionist power of "mere" laws which, left unchecked by "bare existence" can and often do "degenerate to the level of mere lucrative business"; the sense of "becoming" as having priority over "being," or—as a variant of this—the sense of "that-which-is-on-its-way" as the basis for establishing authentic community, and "relationism" as the basis of an authentic and true "communitarianism"; the role of "openness" in helping us overcome our tendency to hide or let ourselves be "shut in," thereby avoiding or evading what is real and needing of our attention and care; the primacy of the unhurried, the meandering, the non-linear, the polysemic, the symbolic, the playful, over the serious—and seriously lethal—strictures of linearity, or what Mr. Sławek describes as the "monolithic structures that call for conformity of thought and act"; the primacy of youth as an essential source of communal wisdom and the impetus for what he describes as "the freshness of language"; and, finally—at the end of a list that must be suggestive of the wide sweep of this book—the conviction that "wildness" is the heart not only of nature but of culture itself, leading to the claim (echoing Thoreau) that "to rescue and re-constitute the turn towards the non-human" is the basis for any responsible thinking about human community.

If asked to identify what genre this volume occupies within the horizon of literature, I would be hard-pressed to answer. It is part journal, part sustained meditation on culture and nature, part memoir in the sense that one feels the presence of the author's life—even if never formally invoked—just at the edges of his prose, part political philosophy, part prophetic utterance in the poetic tradition of Blake. And, though written in prose form, this book precisely by means of its meditative style avoids the curse of being prosaic; Professor Sławek comes across as much as lyric composer as he does as an author of academic prose, and his style—

at once provocative and constructive, meditative and incisive—reflects both the precisions of intellectual argument as well as the poetic impulses of a contrapuntal style of thinking.

If I were pressed to name a handful of books that generate an argument of cultural criticism as demanding and compelling as this—and do so in a manner not only critical but constructive, visionary and even prophetic—this would be one of the titles that would have to be included, along with the recent work of Charles Taylor, Slavoj Žižek (strangely absent in this volume) and Giorgio Agamben. For Sławek, as for the latter two, difference and distinction stand out over homogeneity and oneness as a necessary goad to true thinking, one that prizes "a ceaseless confirmation of difference" and thus the unsettling pressure of "un-self-sufficingness" over conformity and the pressures so engrained in the globalizing pressures of late modernity that tend toward sameness with the violence this entails. Against this, Professor Sławek values with Thoreau a kind of thinking that is "wandering" and "extra-vagant"—a central notion throughout this work—precisely because "it arises on 'the spur of the moment'": "it 'happens,' it 'befalls' us, even, and is found in circulation, in the open space, which plays the part of *agora*, the place of assembly."

Perhaps most tellingly, the whole project of this "essay," as voiced in the closing pages, is the author's unhurried musing on the importance of journeying into the borderlands, his reminder of the urgent need to reclaim the salvific power of "the wild," and his recognition of Thoreau's gift of noticing the essential that awaits us in the midst of the so-called "accidental." Were the volume written today, and not in the years leading up to its first publication in Polish in the last decade (*Ujmować. Henry David Thoreau i wspólnota świata* [Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2009]), one could have expected the central emphasis of "bare existence" to have been modulated, either as prompted by the magnitude of the migrant crisis in Europe or through a deeper analysis of the unregulated international market economy which we have come to call "globalization"—a "passive" violence causally related to the former. The latter exerts an inhumane pressure against every notion of "the *community* of the world," in the human and non-human realms. But the direction of this criticism is clear enough from the framework Prof. Sławek establishes in this penetrating analysis, including his concern over "the privatization of nature," his criticism—in the spirit of Thoreau—of Locke's notion of "the bright idea of property," his proper worry that "debt" has become "a specter haunting the structure of reality" itself, as well, finally, as his concern over "the arrogant economy [of our day] that consists in piling up gains leads to habits that are a threat to the economy itself" (282)—and, one might add, to the overwhelming and growing majority of the world's poor and most vulnerable citizens, to say nothing of creatures and habitats for the non-human realm.

A book like this deserves to be lauded in many voices, among them by recalling the authority of the anonymous voice memorialized in Augustine's *Confessions* (8.12.28),

recalling his hearing a child's voice from the neighboring house chanting over and over: *Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!* What better word could be said in praise of this book to those not yet acquainted with its penetrating and prodigious genius than that they, too, might heed this call: *Take and read! Take and read!*

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John Marsh. *In Walt We Trust: How a Queer Socialist Poet Can Save America from Itself*. New York: Monthly Review, 2015. 256 pages.

Heading towards the end, the author of *In Walt We Trust* proclaims (or, at least, hopes to proclaim one day) what could be a cornerstone of the U.S. Constitution, if it were to be written by Walt Whitman: a democracy of affection. In his queer and neo-Marxist readings of Whitman's poetry, Marsh's ideological standpoint is clear and radical from the start, bearing the qualities of a political manifesto. He does not, however, shy away from problematizing the issues presented, and gives a comprehensive summary of all the criticism the previous queer and neo-Marxist readings of this poetry gathered. Therefore, *In Walt We Trust* may very well serve as a quick and informative introduction to studying Whitman. However, for Marsh's own ideas the readings in question serve simply as the proper context, as the book is so much more. The author himself calls it "a mix of biography, literary criticism, manifesto and, I am not embarrassed to say, self-help" (29). There is a strong sense of call for action in Marsh's readings of Whitman, as well as attention given to personal details—both of Whitman's life, as an author, and of Marsh's life, as a reader. *In Walt We Trust* deals with more than a selection of poems from the poet's *oeuvre*; Marsh examines his life, his political and personal views as known from interviews, notes, letters and the aforementioned disputes surrounding Whitman's life. All of these are, however, just a point of departure, as the main idea behind the book is that Whitman's poetry can still influence American democracy and its citizens in the twenty-first century, an idea based on the author's own example.

The book's premise is that the state of democracy in the United States as of 2015 is a terrible malaise, similar to the one described in a 1979 speech by President Jimmy Carter. Marsh begins with a description of the current crisis:

> Then, as now, the United States wanders in the shadow of an economic recession. Then, as now, Americans have lost faith in their government. True, unlike then, we do not face an immediate energy crisis, but we do face an even graver long-term one in global warming. And if Carter thought that Americans in 1979 worshipped self-indulgence and consumption, what might he make of our bookmarked pornography sites, our McMansions, or Black Friday, the annual holy day we set aside for shopping? (10)

To relieve this malaise, Marsh advises reading Whitman's poetry, and more than reading, applying the poet's ideas in life. The book consists of four clear-cut chapters, in which Marsh examines Whitman's views on issues connected with the above-mentioned malaise, namely: fear of death, focus on money-making, sexual and bodily shame, and democracy's inherent failings. According to Marsh, a reader of Whitman's poetry may deal with all of these failings, and in this way become "an ideal democratic citizen" (204).

Each and every chapter begins with a report of Marsh's pilgrimage to ever more surprising venues: while, with such a formula, a visit paid to Whitman's home is to be expected, an account of an anxious scholarly expedition to a strip club is unheralded. However, all of the excursions serve a purpose: to provide both a biographical background to Whitman's poetry and a modern equivalent of the issues he wrote about, identified by Marsh himself, as he privately sees them. Even though the excursions might seem out of place at first, each and every one of them serves as a way to bridge the time gap between the reality Whitman experienced and the one the readers of *In Walt We Trust* do.

In the first chapter, Marsh deals with Whitman's idea of death as a transition: "What looked like death was merely transformation, a new birth. His favorite metaphor for this rebirth is compost. The dead are buried in the ground, and new life rises out of them" (50–51). Surprisingly, having accounted for the poet's understanding of life as a cycle, in which atoms are constantly exchanged and, on a molecular level, nothing dies, Marsh remains unconvinced—because, in his view, it is one's personality, very much connected to one's brain, that human beings are afraid to lose. One could say ironically that when it comes to death, Marsh does not trust Walt. The little bit of comfort that he finds for his fear of dying is located not in the poet's views on death itself, but on property. The idea that life is not something a person owns, but rather is granted for a limited period of borrowed time also makes for a smooth transition into the next chapter, devoted to money-making as a focus of American life. Nothing, not even the body consisting of atoms constantly exchanged with the rest of the world, can be perceived as really owned, because the notion of property is not a natural part of the universe. In Marsh's view, this insight should allow Americans to put the pursuit of money-making and the "mania of owning things" (77) in their rightful place, and to see them as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

In the interludes between the main chapters, Marsh considers two questions concerning Whitman that still spark discussion throughout academia—whether he was a socialist, and whether he was gay. In both cases, Marsh seeks to problematize these straightforward categories, as he scrupulously reconsiders both arguments for such claims and against them. Ultimately, he settles for Traubel's explanation he was "with them [socialists] in the result" (107) in the former case, and for the broader term *queer* in the latter. Whitman might not have been involved directly in politics, and did not seem to be an open opponent of capitalism, but he shared values with the socialists.

As for the question of Whitman's rumored homosexuality, Marsh starts by reminding the readers that, when it comes to nineteenth-century poets, such categories are quite anachronous, as the notion of gay identity was non-existent at the time, and the term *homosexual* itself barely appeared in medical discourse. Instead, Marsh emphasizes the concept of comrade love, albeit allowing the idea that "perhaps adhesiveness and comradeship gave him [Whitman] a way to make sense out of desires that may have otherwise seemed abnormal" (175) to appear in the pages of his book. What Marsh finds more important is the fact that, regardless of what Walt Whitman's actual sexual preferences were, the poet was indeed "queer," the term being defined as "differing from what is usual or ordinary, especially but not only when it comes to sexuality" (177). The subversive nature of his poetry, the ambiguities of his private life and the challenging stance Whitman took on the morality of his times make the poet, in Marsh's eyes, one of the founding fathers of the sexual revolution.

These biographical notes serve a larger purpose than a simple satisfaction of the voyeuristic interest in Whitman's preferences. The third main chapter of *In Walt We Trust* focuses on the poet's views on sexuality. Marsh examines the notion of shame, which Whitman sought to dispel, both in terms of Aristotle's ideas (shame as imposed by an external factor) and Freud's theories (shame as feeling one betrays their internal perfect image). Whitman's effort to naturalize sexual desire in the Victorian age is a strong argument against the systematic roots of communal shame. The poet reveals everyone (even a "modest woman" in *Song of Myself*) has sexual desires, so sexual shame in the Aristotelean sense is unfounded. Moreover, by celebrating sex and the body, Whitman insists that, in Freudian terms, we should abandon our shame, too, trying to convince us desire is natural and good. Marsh notes that while to the post-sexual-revolution generation such truths may seem obvious, sexual shame is still being instilled, e.g. through sex education, where teenagers are taught about the threats of sex, but not of its joys. Therefore, Whitman's revelations are still relevant both on a personal level and a communal one. The author describes his trip to a strip club, seeks the roots of the shame he feels for visiting such a place (other than his feminist criticism of the practice—Marsh is pleasantly mindful of the issue of women's rights throughout the book), and tries to apply Whitman's ideas to overcome it. His main argument in this chapter is the significance of sex as a way to connect people in a modern society.

The connection between people and the abolition of "a society of strangers" (222) emerge as the main points of *In Walt We Trust*, to which the previous chapters with their ideas on death, love and property lead. In a work entitled *Democratic Vistas,* the poet criticizes the democratic system for its many failings, ranging from the foolishness and political indifference of the masses to the exploitation of the poor—all of which are surprising, as Whitman has come to be known as a bard of democracy. The poet's idea is, as explained by Marsh, that in a democratic society the masses, in a nearly Darwinian evolutionary process, will develop a way to rule wisely, if given a

true democracy first. "It has to create a thoroughly democratic culture, the purpose of which, in turn, would be to create thoroughly democratic citizens" (198). This belief is based on Whitman's ideas of adhesiveness and comrade love. In a deeply emotional description of the poet's help to soldiers wounded in the Civil War, Marsh emphasizes how "thoroughly decent" (214) and empathetic Whitman is in his efforts, bringing not medical help, but love and understanding. Whitman hoped a sense of community would create a better, more democratic society, and Marsh sees this as an answer to the issues bothering democracy today.

In his attempt to establish a link between the reality of a nineteenth-century poet and that of a twenty-first-century American citizen, Marsh summarizes the main ideas of *In Walt We Trust* in the question he poses towards the end: "what kind of person would you be if you read Whitman's poetry?" (203). Marsh's argument is that if we were to follow the poet's ideas, we would be better off, and democracy would be, too. In his view, a true Whitman follower is a supporter of a robust welfare state, because the sense of kinship with other people prevents them from participating in the exclusionary practices of a capitalist society. But Marsh goes further, and simultaneously in a less exclusively leftist direction; once a person has satisfied their basic needs, higher ones appear: "fraternity, love, belonging, dignity and respect" (221). None of them can be granted by any welfare state; yet, according to Marsh, citizens can give them to each other if they follow the ideas of Walt Whitman. In this sense, following the poet, one becomes "a thoroughly democratic citizen" (198). Marsh's prowess in working with the text and caution in recounting the diverse readings of Whitman's poetry and biography make a convincing case for understanding Whitman as a "queer socialist poet."

There are, however, a few drawbacks to the book. Some of them are of a clearly editorial nature, e.g. the disorderly numeration of subchapters in the first essay. While problems of this kind can be easily fixed in the subsequent editions, the unorthodox composition of the book, which includes personal anecdotes, as well as its non-scholarly language will probably prevent some parts of academia from seeing *In Walt We Trust* as an insightful contribution to studying Whitman.

And an insightful contribution it is. In his light-hearted manner, Marsh simultaneously makes a strong case for his argument, contextualizes it thoroughly with a comprehensive summary of the controversies surrounding Whitman's works and life, and reexamines the poems in light of modern politics of the left and beyond. *In Walt We Trust* can be recommended to the uninitiated so that they can quickly expand their understanding of the poet's *œuvre* and significance, as well as to Whitman scholars, who may be interested in the more unorthodox and fresh viewpoint Marsh presents.

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Sascha Pöhlmann. *Future Founding Poetry: Topographies of Beginnings from Whitman to the Twenty-First Century*. Rochester: Camden, 2015. 416 pages.

The expansive voice of Whitman's poetry, so all-encompassing without being dominating, world-disclosing without being deterministic, lives and keeps sustaining American poetry and its most inspired international critical commentary. Sascha Pöhlmann's *Future-Founding Poetry* is a case in point.

Whitman's visionary auguries of his "Song of Myself" (edition of 1892) assure the stunned listener/disciple at one point: "You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left)." Towards the end of the poem this same voice, sensing it has done its office in the present form, reveals itself in the moment of transition toward one of those new futures: "The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them / And proceed to fill my next fold of the future." The past, present, and future are fuzzy categories in Whitman. The future, first, is a load of hope, sheer possibility, whose very fact of being ("there are millions of suns left"), ensures the potential for action and change. An idea of openness appears and becomes accessible to humanity despite its normal knowledge of finitude. What is more, it is a humanized openness, with transcendence fused with agencies that are thoroughly human. The future ceases to be a mechanical physical container and becomes a conceptual, emotional, bodily-physical reality that the human agent modulates. The future is a lived aspect of the present.

Since Emerson, who directs the thrust of the American spirit to the future with his powerful, proto-Nietzschean declaration of the priority of becoming over being, via Whitman, who fleshes out this notion in his living poem-as-organism, through to his twentieth-century American continuators, the American poetic culture has worked with the notion of the future as a palpable presence. This understanding pervades the Emersonian text, Whitman's poetry, and, since them, it has continued to find its new realizations in regions that are not necessarily poetic. It is present, for instance, in William James characterization of some human choices as "living, forced, momentous" ("The Will to Believe" 458), his characterization of pragmatism as a "program for more work" (*Pragmatism* 509), John Dewey's descriptions of purposeful human actions in environment as always including a dynamically flexible notion of goals, and in a plethora of more contemporary philosophical or literary-critical Emersonian-pragmatist readings of the American tradition which vest meanings and significance with linguistic action and its ongoing transitiveness. Beyond this pragmatist vein, the Emersonian diagnoses of becoming have been modulated into a fascinating dialogue with the continental tradition by Stanley Cavell, in whose ephemeral, digressive text the notion of future as potential takes the form of the idea of the "new yet unapproachable America."

Sascha Pöhlmann's thrilling and ambitious study is a condensation of many strands that inform the Whitmanian American thought into the term of "future-founding," which also allows the author to identify a specific line that cultivates the Whitmanian tones and formulas into the politically troubled twentieth century. "Future-founding" is the term that encompasses those features that make poetry an active participant, but also place, where future is taken care of and cultivated. Pöhlmann argues that the future orientation of the Whitmanian poetic culture always seeks the capacity to restart the future: it depends on the capability of the imagination to make new beginnings. Thus, "future-founding" is a term with which to study not just novelties, but modes of reimagining and restarting the future. Future-founding poetry is not concerned with originality and novelty but, crucially, with *sustainability*. Although the term may have legitimate reverberations for ecological approaches to poetry, its basic sense is related to the activation of the imaginative capability of poetry to enter new modes of thought of the future and new imaginative frames within which the present may become a future.

The focus on the poem as a place where future as sheer potential is reworked into a specific imagination of a new beginning allows Pöhlmann to channel the Whitmanian energies into modes of reworking the non-transcendental, physical, material, political and social exigencies of the twentieth century. The analysis of future-founding modes of making beginnings will be inseparable from the thinking of the poem as an *emplaced* performative act that must be responsive to the needs of the living human beings and the crises in which they are continuously thrown.

The poets and poetries Pöhlmann's book discusses are examples of continuing this thought by avoiding the notion of poetic influence, and, instead, showing how Whitman's presence and foundation demand new formulas of beginning within the overall Whitmanian space of changeability and potential. Whitman himself, his poem and its performative self, is the place of beginning. Here, it is vital to note the importance of form and aesthetics—the theme that will keep surfacing in other places of the study. Whitman's voices are able to activate the future inherent in the present because of the specific qualities of his free verse. The free verse is not just expansive, but it provides a cognitive tool which is the actual meeting place of the future and the now: "liberated from traditional restrictive forms [it[allow[s] the speaker of the poem to revise his own words… to make possibilities, paradoxes" (54). The key issue is to catalyze a future without making it into a rigid plan: "this is what makes it so unconditionally future-founding: [Whitman] insists on framing the future in the present without trying to determine is completely" (54). This approach is at the heart of Pöhlmann's notion of *sustainability*, and it is the movabilities inherent in Whitman's free verse that provide its proper formal home. Sustainability thus comprehended makes the Whitmanian poem a place of the "cultivation" of the future, an area of human action that is "counter-entropic" (53).

This precedence of the form comes to the fore in the modernist beginning-making practiced by Williams. Pöhlmann shows Williams as the first continuator of Whitman in the line he describes and as a poet who must start with the considerations of form. In Williams, the eruptive and spontaneous verse formula initiated by Whitman gains more self-awareness and, with it, a measure of self-control. Williams is first in the procession of the twentieth century practitioners of future-founding who realize how some more ominous realities of the century demand a more careful, measured, approach to the flexibility of free verse. Williams's stress on "measure" is a way of making the poem more physically united with its actual physical environment and Williams's insistence on locality is a realization of the demand of emplacement originally encoded in Whitman. Moreover, with such degree of self-awareness, we move closer to the realization that it is the poem itself that is the place of future-founding and the stage on which to make its performative beginning. This aspect—the placing of the poem as a certain reality in its own right at the center of the process in question—lies at the heart of Williams experiments in *Paterson*, and its continuations are going to be found in all remaining poets discussed by Pöhlmann.

With the next two poets discussed in the book, Langston Hughes and Muriel Rukeyser, the Whitmanian future-founding mode enters decisively the area of political and cultural struggle which also, in both cases, makes poetry a deeply communal practice. Hughes's is the mode of future-founding that Pöhlmann argues should be characterized as marked by "urgency" (157). In it, poetry must be "more demanding in [its] socio-political quest" (161). Pöhlmann shows how Hughes's exploration of the motif of dreaming, communal in nature, merges with "the active struggle to realize dreams, rather than perpetuate them" (169). The communal element of poetry is next shown to be pushed further onto the terrains of cultural struggles in Rukeyser's feminist stylistics in which the personal is revealed as inseparable from the communal and the political. Hughes's "urgency" is here retained, as Rukeyser stresses the affinity of poetry making with forms of agency, poetry becoming a form of active intervention into a cultural crisis. With this, future-founding also becomes a form of active choosing of one's tradition, and, thus, one's future.

The next chapter, focusing on the future-founding formula developed by Allen Ginsberg, demonstrates how the entire mode may in fact transcend the category of nationality. Ginsberg's intervention into the crisis that befalls him—the sense of utter waste and *malaise* ensuing from the atmosphere of the cold war—demands that future-founding seeks new emplacements—beyond America. While Whitman's America remains the foundational scene of the mode, Ginsberg pushes it toward a post-national agenda by seeking a spiritual dwelling not just for new "Americans" but for humanity. Thus Ginsberg diverts not only from Whitman, but also from Williams by departing from his locality and entering a decisively intercultural scene. Another interesting aspect of the Ginsbergian future-founding mode is a new positioning of tone in which

poetry finds its modesty, admits its futility or failure, in fact recycles the present moment of failure: "what is failure in the present can thus turn out to be a success in the future" (301). This kind of performativity finds paradoxical solace and new starting point in admitting helplessness.

The final chapter examines the notion of future-founding by applying it to poetry written after the catastrophe of 9/11. The chapter reviews strategies of future-founding beginning making employed by this poetry. Among those the most important seem to be: returning to the basic powers of language and looking for formulas of approaching the event which will avoid simplistic cultural stigmatization, by redefining the division between civilization and barbarism away from the lines that divide cultures and religions.

Pöhlmann's study is an exhilarating return to the living presence of the Whitmanian spirit that keeps nourishing the American poetic culture. It is also a very interesting proposition of capturing the perennial future orientation of this culture. Yet, in its expansiveness and interpretive zeal, the entire project seems at times to skip over some methodological or critical issues too easily. I will close this review by briefly signaling those gaps, instances of avoidance, or omissions.

To say that future needs to be cared for, that futures are human-made, is to utter a certain epistemological stance that finds its full articulation in the Emersonian-pragmatist American continuations which I mentioned at the start of my text. It is a close genetic relation between the Whitmanian poetics and the Emersonian-pragmatist removing of epistemology from the framework of representational thinking that is responsible for this poetry's belief in the possibility of catalyzing beginnings and futures. Pöhlmann never ventures into these regions, and thus his study's theoretical base, although ample and diverse, seems strangely incomplete.

Apart from the pragmatist commentary on poetics, another name that one would expect to find in this analysis of avoiding finality is that of Stanley Cavell. Pöhlmann's argument, his key notion of "sustainability," rests on the idea according to which "American is 'unfinishable'" (52). But why should it be so? The whole notion of such continuous resourcefulness or potentially endless "sustainability"—the notion by all means present in the poets discussed in the book—has something to do with the elusive practice of textual care for kindling interpretive potential, a mode of thought that dodges finality and determinate identity that Cavell, seeking to approach Emerson, names as "unapproachable" (121). It is clear that Pöhlmann's "unifinishable" America, as a concept, is contained within this Cavellian "unapproachability." Yet, the rich Cavellian discussions are never mentioned here, which creates a disappointing lacuna.

Finally, it seems to me that the notion of the poetic influence is discarded too hastily in this study. "I explicitly reject the connotations of linearity and influence" (19), writes Pöhlmann, attempting to show his poets not as rivals—which is how the theory of influence would see them—but as a family of kindred-sprits engaged in responding to successive political or cultural crises. But this is not enough. The poets

may be continuators of one another on a certain level, but the intricacies of reworking the past formulas so that they attain the condition of meaning again involve inter-poetic pressures that occur unavoidably between poems. In other words, the tracing of defenses against the other poem as a kind of pressure or limitation is a kind of measure that allows us to see value and genuine gain—of conceptual, cognitive, and aesthetic nature occurring in the new poem. Avoiding this theme may result in mistaking the failure of finding a poetically strong, well-composed response to the earlier poem for "spontaneity," as Pöhlmann does, for example, in his discussion of Ginsberg. Do we really believe Ginsberg when the poet shifts the area of his search for originality to the Buddhist grounds and claims that thought should be traced to an "unborn womb" (269)? This sounds too metaphysically vague to carry any genuine potential. The real weakness of this stance may be that all the "thoughts" of the poem may in fact belong to its predecessor.

By avoiding such issues, and by concentrating on the sheer fact that poems are able to always declare their position and role of fresh beginners, Pöhlmann also passes too smoothly over the questions of the aesthetic. While all aesthetics is political, not all aesthetic stance are of equal efficacy. This problem is clearly seen in the final chapter in which poetry that sounds strong formally and intellectually compelling, such a poem by W. S. Merwin, is discussed side by side with the kind of well-meaning verse that simply fails to attain the condition of poetry.

I say the above with a full awareness that it is easy to provide such criticisms without a full discussion. Such a full discussion would need to reexamine the thoroughly pragmatist merger of action in the material world with the issues of politics and aesthetics. But even if I had more space to sustain my critique properly, it would only be done in support and as an act of friendly complementation of Pöhlmann's entire project, which I admire and wish to keep returning to.

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Andrew S. Gross. *The Pound Reaction: Liberalism and Lyricism in Midcentury American Literature*. Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2015. 262 pages.

Andrew Gross's *The Pound Reaction* was singled out for excellence even before it was printed. When still in manuscript, it had already received the 2013 EAAS Rob Kroes biennial Publication Award for the best book in Europe's American Studies in the years 2011–2012 and was put on a fast track to publication, as part of the elite series European Views of the United States at the prestigious Universitätsverlag Winter, Heidelberg. Whether it was the best American Studies book from the Old Continent this reviewer cannot judge—but it is certainly a book which deserves distinction.

In his informed, balanced, if also quite familiar initial argument, Gross tells the story of how Ezra Pound's person and the book he wrote in the weeks immediately following his arrest, *The Pisan Cantos*, underwent a coordinated process of, respectively, legal rediscription and a critical, highly selective reinterpretation to meet the expedients of the Cold War era and America's need to position itself as a land of intellectual freedom. One element of the operation was Pound's court-enforced hospitalization tantamount to assuring his immunity from grave legal consequences. In a parallel process, *The Pisan Cantos*—its fascism, anti-Semitism, and anti-usury crankiness notwithstanding (7–8)—was carefully positioned as personal, lyrical and suggesting Pound's retreat from, and a pained remorse about, his previous fascist politics. "Pull down thy vanity" passage in Canto 81, however unrepresentative or misunderstood, became the most often anthologized excerpt from *The Pisan Cantos*. As Gross writes, "the Cold War anticommunism helped create the cultural-political context in which a self-proclaimed fascist could become a champion of free speech and aesthetic autonomy" (15). Pound became "an exportable symbol of artistic freedom in the age of containment" (24). Underhandedly, the book explains why, within this postwar discursive field, he could not have been made to stand to trial and executed like others were whose activities during the World War were strikingly similar—most prominently, William Joyce aka Lord Haw-Haw. The highest point of this trend was the notorious decision to award him the first Bollingen Award in 1949.

"The Pound reaction" here is a shorthand term for the complex response of American postwar poets to this "lyricization" of Pound's work, a concerted effort to resymbolize Pound's legacy to make it fit the arising Cold War ideology. Curiously, the institutionalization of Pound (at St. Elizabeth's) and of his aesthetics (at universities) helped to catalyze the identity formation of many American poets. Gross offers accounts of how the Pound case had left indelible marks on the careers of, among several others, Karl Shapiro, W. H. Auden, Peter Viereck, and John Berryman.

The chemical connotations of the word "reaction" are not as off the mark as they might seem. Gross's book seems less about poetry than about all-permeating discursive structures underlying poetry which, with the post-Bollingen-Prize hangover as a catalyst,

underwent some dynamic and profound, almost-molecular, reactions. Gross has the enviable ability and perspicacity to find his way through a large body of often uninspiring, wearying and sometimes slightly confused essays about the Bollingen controversy, postwar liberalism and confessionalism. He skillfully navigates through this maze; he is never at a loss to tell the important from the marginal, knows what to use from a bad essay and where the error was made. One only wishes he did not synopsize on poems or even entire poetry volumes as swiftly as he does on critical essays. If Robert Lowell's "Falling Asleep over the Aeneid" is treated quite roughly; we'll have to take Gross on his word when he offers a minimalist rundown of the *The Mills of the Kavanaughs*, a volume is usually thought of as difficult. To be sure, the scope and the ambition of the book requires such shortcuts.

Karl Shapiro's career is shown as systematically bucking the postwar trends: he began with his isolated vote against Pound on the grounds of his Jewish identity when everyone else was emphasizing anti-Stalinist liberalism and individualism. He soon afterwards began to lean toward liberalism (what he himself called "negative Jewishness") precisely as other American intellectuals were switching toward the concept of identity as more effectively explaining American society—a process in which confessional poetry is shown to have partaken. (In fact Gross claims that Shapiro's repeated "contrariness" accounts for the poet's fall from early fame [73].) I consider the account of the shift from liberalism to identity politics quite superb.

W. H. Auden, for his turn, supported Pound's candidacy for the Bollingen award, but his stance on the controversy was ambiguous. In fact, Auden did endorse Pound's case but hoped the modernist's work would be censored and made available only to professional scholars whose community he imagined in *The Age of Anxiety*. Gross's intervention here consists in arguing that Auden's poem, or sometimes simply its title, had been misinterpreted according to the individualistic bias prevalent after the war. The critic shows that *The Age of Anxiety* is not exactly right-wing and Christian existentialist, as it is often seen today. It is an allegory envisioning a new community, and the dynamics within this new community, with which the postwar displaced intellectual might seek identification. Another poet's response to the Bollingen award for Pound then is shown to reflect a dramatic reorganization of the discursive landscape in the postwar years.

Shapiro's case is similar to that of Peter Viereck, the subject of Gross's analysis in Chapter 4. (Gross deserves praise for, among several things, interrogating the work of this gravely neglected poet.) Viereck's career, too, "fell through the cracks" after the "seismic" change in the cultural landscape caused by the Pound scandal. Initially a winner of the Pulitzer Prize and a recipient of two Guggenheims, Viereck got sidelined by the regrouping of all the major concepts of the postwar cultural field. As conservatism became increasingly populist and aesthetic avant-gardism got sealed off from the public world, his insistence on intellectual conservatism and on formalism quickly made him obsolete. Gross examines Viereck's private motives underlying his crusade

against Pound as well as, more importantly, the exclusionary workings of coteries (like that of modernist critics or New Critics) to account for the poet's decline. His readings of Viereck's criticism are incisive; his narrative of Viereck's vicissitudes engaging.

Gross does not limit his study to the Bollingen award jury members and in the final chapters he seems to break out from the established pattern in other ways. He includes, for instance, an analysis of John Berryman's position on the imbroglio (not on the jury, Berryman drafted only a minor essay on the subject, one that was never published). With laudable perspicacity and imagination, Gross discusses the significance of Berryman's almost lifelong engagement of the figure of "imaginary Jew." Where even such experts on the figures of the Jew and Holocaust in American poetry as Hilene Flanzbaum simplistically castigated Berryman for what she saw was the bombastic and self-pitying arrogation of the Jewish identity, Gross offers a very arcane account of how the figure of the imaginary Jew became for Berryman a procedure to intuit a new, post-modern, more inclusive poetic voice that would resist the prejudicial drive of modernist poetics. The other chapter—on Katherine Porter and Leslie Fiedler (only the former of whom was on the jury)—is just as strong and daring. The two intellectuals are shown as evoking—mindful of Pound's case—tropes of pornography which illustrated mental mechanisms of de-individuation characterizing the reasoning (or unreasoning) of many intellectuals on both the radical right and the radical left of the political spectrum, including the author of *Cantos*.

As a reviewer, I almost feel obliged to complain a little. The book's abstractions, at least in its first half, are at times a little wearying; every now and then the text seems slightly repetitive; one gets the impression, for instance, that it collects essays which once could stand entirely on their own (indeed some of the chapters were published independently [xviii]) and that the conceptual girders supporting individual case studies are now repeated redundantly. The discussion of *The Pisan Cantos* as anti-Semitic borders even on a slapdash treatment. Looked at from a still different perspective, *The Pound Reaction* sometimes seems a bit too dryly analytic, especially given the poetic tastes of its most likely audience—that is to say, poetry critics.

That said, though not exactly for those fond of poetry criticism, this book actually fills a serious gap in research. In part belonging to this small category of books discussing the institutionalization and politics of American poetry (which includes Jed Rasula's *The American Poetry Wax Museum: Reality Effects, 1940–1990* and Alan Golding's *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry*), it is the first study to discuss comprehensively and exhaustively the watershed importance of the Bollingen Prize controversy in the shaping of the postwar poetic and critical landscape in the US. More importantly, toward the end, all of the shortcomings are forgiven. The last two chapters are nothing if not imaginative; here is where *The Pound Reaction* becomes truly engaging and impressively virtuosic.

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Michael Snape. *God and Uncle Sam: Religion and America's Armed Forces in World War II*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015. 704 pages.

General Douglas MacArthur once told a graduate class at West Point, "The soldier, above all other men, is required to practice the greatest act of religious training—sacrifice." With his earlier military experience in the Second World War, MacArthur likely had a fairly good idea of the role that religion itself played in the lives of men who often made or were quite close to making the ultimate sacrifice during war. The role of religion has been closely examined in a superlative study by Michael Snape, Professor of Anglican Studies at Durhan University, in his book *God and Uncle Sam*, potentially opening up a new field in military studies while simultaneously adding a new chapter to the field of religious studies. Not that the topic had been completely ignored. But although churches in the home front had been subject to earlier research, the first book to closely take up the question of religion in the military had been Deborah Dash Moore's pioneering study on a group that only made up five percent of the American armed forces, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (2004).

Snape uses the standard sources for such a historical study, including mining the work of military historians for clues for his analysis, as well as that of sociologists and pollsters. What brings particular illumination to the topic is his use of the rich sources of the American army chaplaincy from the Second World War, as well as the recollections and memoirs from veterans of the army, navy and marines. Thus his book ranges from a traditional history that provides a broad context of the selected problem, a study of a pertinent institution serving the pastoral needs of soldiers, as well as providing a vivid presentation of the soldiers drawing upon religion during combat—in other words the affective turn in contemporary historical writing is also given its due. The author likewise cautiously suggests how the religious experience of men at arms and the society at home during the war might have contributed to religious life in America in the subsequent decades.

Overall, religious life in the United States was on the decline in the interwar period. The attack on Pearl Harbor had an almost instantaneous effect. Contemporary viewers might be forgiven for considering as incredulous Marshall Will Kane's rescue by his Quaker wife shooting one of his assailants in the 1952 Western classic *High Noon*. But in a provocative manner the scene encapsulates the mood shift of American religious life that had taken place a decade earlier at the outbreak of the war in the country. Snape informs the reader: "such was the combative mood of the times that even a majority of Quaker, Mennonite and Church of the Brethren draftees—all adherents of the so-called 'Historic Peace Churches'—opted to serve in the armed forces" (30).

The key institution for providing pastoral service for the men was the chaplaincy, which Chief of Staff of US Army George C. Marshall expanded to service the citizen soldiers as best as possible. For the army branch of the armed services the Office of Chief

Chaplain during the war was in the capable hands of William R. Arnolds. Although the army had a number of chaplains, it was necessary to meet Marshall's goal to add a sizable group of civilian clergymen from approximately seventy denominations to the service: a daunting task which Arnolds admirably performed. The first Catholic to hold the post, ironically it was the Catholic Church that was least cooperative with the army. Complaining of a shortage of priests in general at the time, the Church was unwilling to provide a greater number of chaplains. Among the most difficult position was that of the African American chaplains. They were often the only officers in colored units, where religious services were segregated, and frequently had to face the distrust of the white officers. The diversity of assignments required adaptability on the part of the chaplains and of the structures of the institution itself. The rationale for the chaplaincy was the "Freedom of Exercise" clause of the Bill of Rights but the role it played in maintaining the morale of the fighting force is what made its contribution to the war effort so crucial:

> [I]n the midst of a foreign war of unrivaled magnitude, the American armed forces benefited from a sufficient supply of trained and well-adjusted younger clergymen who proved indispensible in supporting the morale of millions of citizen soldiers, sailors and marines, many of whom were deemed to be without any prior church connections. (137)

The military itself promoted a religious culture among its leadership and the chaplaincy was augmented by chapels, religious broadcasting and publications. The author shows the institutional support for religion was a factor quite influential in developing wartime religious attitudes among the service men and women. Nonetheless, much as in civilian life certain groups such as Catholics and African Americans or women were more religiously observant. Other negative aspects also found their way into religious life in the military world, among them the imported tensions and antagonisms which were impossible to eliminate, despite all the efforts undertaken.

The fourth chapter presenting the role of religion in course of combat is the emotional heart of the book. "Foxhole Religion and Wartime Faith" vividly demonstrates that: "To a very great extent the intensity of religion in the military seemed contingent on the proximity or experience of danger" (317). A Catholic navy chaplain describes the effect of experiencing a Japanese bombardment on the men:

> The shells trailed dazzling paths of crimson as they rocketed out of their ships' cannons.... Alongside me, head bowed, there were Catholic boys reciting their rosaries, Protestants murmuring prayers, and Jewish boys, with closed eyes, fingering the holy *mezuzahs* they wore around their necks.... Even those who hadn't uttered a word of prayer or been inside a house of worship for years before the war, were looking now for a Divine hand to shield them. (322–323)

Nevertheless, "foxhole religion" affected a minority of the military since most men did not serve on the front or battleships as the case may be, nor did it have particularly

lasting effect. Albeit also affecting a small number of soldiers, another wartime experience that led to heightened religious response was captivity. With the attendant hardship and uncertainties, periods of reflection often resulted in religious experience. And, of course, there were many opportunities for heartfelt prayers for the dead. Another effect of the experience of ever present danger, despite being the most technologically advanced armed forces the world had seen up until that time, was an increased focus on the afterlife.

Religious experience hardly turned men into angels, and military life could do the reverse, i.e. have a demoralizing effect, as the author documents in the next chapter. Moreover, the carnage witnessed and perpetrated by them left its indelible mark, often leading to spontaneous questions of theodicity and in some cases resulting in "protest atheism."

This brief overview hardly does justice to the richness of this meticulously researched and well written book on a complex subject; all in all an exemplary work of narrative history. Snape concludes his work by attempting to place his findings within the context of the postwar rise in religious practice that was witnessed in American life. Part of the answer to this growth repeated over the years connected it with the nuclear threat of the Cold War; a larger impact was simply the return to family life of the servicemen and raising the children of the post-war baby boom, and child rearing is often accompanied by church going. Still, the sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell in *America Grace* of 2010, their seminal study of religious life in the United States, are inclined to also include the wartime experience of "foxhole religion" by such a large portion of the male population at that time as a factor. In response to the last point, Snape reiterates his findings that albeit military life did lead to an increase in religious practice for various reasons, in the long run exposure to danger was among the least of them. He speculates that on the other hand perpetrating atrocities might even have lead some to sense religion as a possible means for expiation of their deeds. One might recall in popular culture on his road to redemption the protagonist of David Lynch's *Straight Story* of 1999, an aging member of the "Greatest Generation," must deal with just such memories. Snape concludes, "regardless of its long-term benefits for American religion, the experience of World War II was unquestionably a terrible way to find salvation" (599). One can only say Amen to that.

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Laurence W. Mazzeno. *The Critics and Hemingway, 1924–2014: Shaping an American Literary Icon*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2015. 302 pages.

Hemingway's contempt for critics has had a share in establishing his literary status, and it has been acknowledged, often approvingly, by the critics themselves. When his works grew self-conscious, it also fuelled their narrative patterns. In "Birth of a New School," a chapter in *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway, young but already experienced, knowing how hunger, loneliness, clarity of vision and discipline interrelate to help an aspiring writer, is working in the Closerie des Lilas, his "home cafe," when a young fat man with spectacles comes in and interrupts Hemingway's writing to talk about his own inability to write. Hemingway's advice is that he should learn to write criticism: "Then you can always write. You won't ever have to worry about it not coming nor being mute and silent." The "rotten son of a bitch" is quick to learn and give his opinion on the writer's work: "Hem too stark, too stripped, too lean, too sinewy" (95–96). Contemptuous as he is of a newly born critic, Hemingway feels compelled to touch the rabbit's foot he keeps in his pocket for luck. The intruder appears in *Moveable Feast* years after he failed as a famous critic. One has a feeling that his rudeness is not entirely unwelcome as he lets Hemingway define and entertain again the conditions of his work at the lucky time when "it is really going."

In the 1950s Hemingway's African hunting camp was also a good place to let voices critical of his writings be heard and creatively responded to, if not silenced. In *True at First Light*, a fictionalized account of the safari, it is often his wife who formulates opinions Hemingway-the writer cannot afford to ignore. Commenting on the spear hunting night trips her husband is determined not to share with anybody, Mary tells him: "Why don't you write something so I'll be really proud" (225). A few pages later in the book, Mary's words return in a much more venomous version in a letter from "a woman in Iowa." The letter contains a clipping from *The Des Moines Register and Tribune* where the reviewer makes a list of the "main faults" of Hemingway's work. While Hemingway's response to his wife's remark is toned down ("Maybe I'll write something too"), his reaction to the letter is considerably less so: "I thought the hell with this stupid Iowa bitch writing letters to people she does not know about things she knows nothing about and I wished her the grace of a happy death as soon as possible, but I remembered her last sentence: 'Why not write SOMETHING that is worthwhile, before you die?' and I thought, you ignorant Iowa bitch, I have already done this and I will do it again many times" (228). In the passage whose last words remind one of Hemingway's thoughts in his Parisian study in *A Moveable Feast* the word "but" is, of course, of special interest; restoring a sense of distance towards himself rather than towards his correspondent, it explains why Hemingway bothers to comment on the letter in his book and why in the passages that immedi-

ately precede and follow the comment he feels compelled to mention the names of Edmund Wilson and Bernard Berenson, the critics whose knowledge of and trust in his work he can count on.

Hemingway needed critics, spoke and wrote about them (often self-reflexively and self-ironically), to affirm his artistic integrity, to keep working according to his own standards which remained unchanged, possibly unchallenged, since his years in Paris. The critics have needed Hemingway because despite or thanks to such aesthetically grounded resistance to change (what, after Faulkner, some might take or mistake for its failure to experiment) Hemingway's work has retained the authority and the energy of the greatest literary achievements to address the evolving interests of its commentators and of their time. Neither has the writer's life lost its power to attract attention of new biographical approaches. Of Hemingway's "iconic" role Michael Reynolds wrote: "he burned so much more brightly than most [of his friends and enemies who outlived him] that we still read their statements by his light" (3).

In his book titled *The Critics and Hemingway, 1924–2014: Shaping an American Literary Icon*, Laurence W. Mazzeno traces the history of the somewhat uncanny phenomenon of Hemingway's recognition and popularity through numerous examples chosen for their representative function in the field of Hemingway studies: over one thousand sources are listed in the "Works Cited" section of the publication. Mazzeno's interest is clearly in 'how' rather than 'why' such a massive body of criticism, both by his admirers and by his detractors, has grown and is likely to continue growing around Hemingway's life and work. The book's focus is on critics whom Hemingway has given "light." Its ambition, Mazzeno explains, is to provide "an examination of how the reputation was built over a century by a combination of popular and academic commentary" (8) rather than assemble an annotated bibliography of that commentary. The merit of the publication should be judged, however, not on the basis of how insightfully it "examines" but how comprehensively it "presents" for, as Mazzeno himself says of his method, he refrains from his own analyses and evaluative comments on the critical texts. Instead, he chooses to select quotations from them so that "[his] readers can get a sense of tone as well as the substance of what was written about Hemingway" (9).

Offering the space of more than one paragraph to but a few major texts, acknowledging the presence of many by a few lines only, Mazzeno's book pieces together an overview of Hemingway criticism and scholarship in a chronological arrangement. Readers are guided through a wealth of information by its division into ten chapters whose titles aim at encapsulating distinctive features of the periods covered, e.g.: "Spokesperson of the Lost Generation (1924–1932)," "The Critics' Darling (1952–1961), "'A Sea Change' in Hemingway Studies (1986–1990)," "The Undisputed Champ Once More (2011–2014)." Subsections in the chapters usually embrace critical responses

to Hemingway's particular works, their first and new editions, as well as those texts, or collections of texts on Hemingway, including his biographies, which respond primarily to the demands of cultural contexts and theoretical perspectives at the time of their appearance (the last two decades witnessing frequent revisits to areas relating to gender, race, religion, environment and politics). A chronological sweep through periods of criticism has its obvious functional advantages; apart from ensuring clarity and consistency in the book's design, it helps identify continuities and changes in the steady growth of the library which builds the writer's reputation and to which Mazzeno's book itself now belongs. But there is also a certain danger to such an orderly presentation. Despite the well-lighted pattern of sections and subsections and despite the narrative effect their titles seem to evoke, the method invites structural repetitiveness, perhaps most noticeably so in the pages where transitions from texts or fragments of texts with positive judgments of Hemingway's particular works to those with negative ones are necessary. Helped by a variety of convenient expressions, such as "Not everyone was so euphoric ," "Not everyone, however was ready to accept…'" "Lewis's view was not shared by everyone, of course ," "The dichotomy can be seen… ," "There were criticisms, of course… ," "On the other side of the critical ledger…" (these taken only from the first two chapters of the book), Mazzeno's text manages to retain a measure of grace under the pressure of controversies Hemingway provoked, conflicting, not always nuanced, prisms through which his life and work have been viewed.

Published in the series "Literary Criticism in Perspective," *The Critics and Hemingway* is a rigorously researched reference book to be consulted when one wants to learn who said what and when about Hemingway before deciding (or not) to look for any of the critical sources it takes account of. As Mazzeno writes in his Introduction, "the sheer volume of Hemingway criticism makes it imperative that [he] be selective" (8). Once we accept the book's American leaning, the selections it makes bear convincing and vivid testimony to this volume and the very resourcefulness of critics responsible for creating it. Despite its necessary selectiveness, the strength of the text which details the growth of Hemingway's reputation lies in its cumulative effect. Taking on the task which must have been a very laborious one, carrying the burden of a big amount of material to be considered with enthusiasm, the book certainly deserves a good and easily accessible place on Hemingway library shelves.

The question remains which shelf *The Critics and Hemingway* properly belongs to. I personally doubt if "the community of dedicated Hemingway scholars" (9) which, as Mazzeno declares, he does not pretend to be part of can accept his guide to their realm as a particularly useful one, if only for the reason of their natural tendency to be highly selective. Of some texts, I am sure, they would rather not be reminded. I also doubt if the so called "general readers" would want to benefit from what the book

richly offers; they still may prefer discovering or re-discovering Hemingway's texts on their own to learning about them through mediating practices of the critical discourse, whether clarifying or mystifying. The answer to the question of the book's addressee can, perhaps, be looked for in Mazzeno's "Conclusion: The Enduring Master," where he comments on the role Kent State University Press has recently played in continuing and proliferating Hemingway studies with its two 2015 publications on "teaching" Hemingway. Hemingway, Mazzeno writes, "will remain a staple in college classrooms, either for his own value as an artist or as a 'cultural text' to assist students in understanding the past, appreciating the present, and shaping the future" (230). This sounds like a dedicated academic teacher's wish and at the same time a prediction of who his book's most grateful recipients are likely to be.

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Joanna Ziarkowska and Ewa Łuczak, eds. *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego: Momaday, Silko, Erdrich, Alexie, Vizenor* [Native American Writers: Momaday, Silko, Erdrich, Alexie, Vizenor]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2015. 247 pages.

In 2019, it will have been fifty years since N. Scott Momaday's second work, *House Made of Dawn*, published in 1968, won him the Pulitzer Prize, as well as fame and critical acclaim. The five decades which have elapsed since that event have seen the rise of modern Native American literature, of which Momaday is one of the leading exponents. They have also seen the emergence and evolution of ethnic and postcolonial studies, within the scope of which is Native American literature. A fiftieth anniversary is a good opportunity to look back on what has been accomplished in a particular field and to sum up the developments which have taken place so far. Unsurprisingly, the monograph *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego: Momaday, Silko, Erdrich, Alexie, Vizenor*

references the aforementioned turning point in the history and reception of American Indian literature on more than one occasion. Edited by Joanna Ziarkowska and Ewa Łuczak, and published in 2015 by Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego as part of the series "Mistrzowie Literatury Amerykańskiej," the volume inscribes itself into the summing-up that being past the half-century mark inevitably encourages in any domain.

The monograph is a collection of twelve essays by established Polish Americanists-*cum*-literary scholars. The volume opens with an introduction by its editors, who have also contributed some of the articles which make it up. Additionally, the texts are interspersed with biographical entries on the Native American writers the monograph is concerned with. Apart from Ewa Łuczak and Joanna Ziarkowska, the list of contributors to *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* includes Ewelina Bańka, Joanna Durczak, Julia Fiedorczuk, Józef Jaskulski, Gabriela Jeleńska, Barbara Leftih, Zuzanna Ładyga, Jadwiga Maszewska and Marek Paryż. The above-mentioned scholars explore the works of the five Native American authors mentioned in the monograph's title. In each essay, the focus is usually on a single major work, making the study of the literary text it analyzes extensive and exhaustive. With the exception of N. Scott Momaday, more than one essay is devoted to each of the writers whose *œuvre* the book covers. *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* may thus be seen as a survey of modern American Indian literature as represented by authors born in four subsequent decades, from the 1930s to the 1960s, and thus belonging to two different literary generations. The thematic range of the volume is not limited to prose. The book-length study encompasses both fiction and non-fiction, literary as well as critical texts by Native Americans. In addition, Julia Fiedorczuk's essay focuses on Louise Erdrich's poetry. Media other than literature are also explored, as Joanna Ziarkowska's interesting discussion of the role of photography in both Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* and the life and perception of the Native American community in general demonstrates.

Dealing with Native American, or for that matter *any* ethnic, literature is, by definition, a complicated and challenging task. The main title of one of the volume's essays, Józef Jaskulski's "Na rozdrożu," refers to Sherman Alexie's novel *Reservation Blues*, but it could just as well be applied to the study of indigenous literatures in general. Researchers who venture to study one of such literatures must be well-versed in two literary, linguistic and cultural traditions, between which they are, so to speak, suspended. Scholars of ethnic literatures are thus, inevitably, at the crossroads, doomed to confront never-ending complexities and dilemmas. To this are added the unavoidable frictions between the dominant culture and the marginalized one. The authors of *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* are perfectly aware of such inevitabilities. The editors signal it at the very beginning of the book, when they point out that the term *American Indian literatures* is in fact preferable to *American Indian literature*, the plural form emphasizing "variety and multiculturalism" (9, translation mine). This key aspect

of the problematics central to the monograph resurfaces at various points throughout it, for instance when the authors look at pan-Amerindianism and the danger of obliterating tribal distinctions it may entail. In fact, as Ewelina Bańka reminds us in her essay on Gerald Vizenor, even the term *Indian* itself is highly problematic, being a "colonial linguistic construct" (216, translation mine), at once deceptively simplistic, monolithic and artificial. The contributors to *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* unanimously avoid the trap of oversimplification and a tendency to see the literature in question in black and white terms. To me, this is one of the monograph's biggest assets.

One of the main aims of both Native American literature—or literatures, as the monographers would have it—and the scholarship it gives rise to is, as I see it, to counteract stereotypes. In order to do so, such stereotypes must, of course, first be identified. The authors of the essays which make up the collection are careful to do so on numerous occasions. Importantly, they also trace the way such stereotypes, largely the product of the dominant Euro-American culture and rife in popular culture, appear in the work of American Indian writers, who oppose them, negotiate them, but also, unavoidably, sometimes fall victim to them. While stereotyping Native Americans, or for that matter any ethnic group, is undesirable—to say the least, universality is a sought-after quality in literature and, generally, in art. When the indigenous authors in question manage to achieve it, the contributors to *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* note it. Significantly, the latter are also scrupulous in signaling analogies between the condition of American Indians and other marginalized and brutalized ethnic groups. In her impressive essay on Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*, Joanna Durczak's multifaceted analysis takes account of Afro-American literature as well as the Holocaust experience. Such examples show that another trap the contributors to the monograph avoid is that of solipsism, any specialist's nemesis.

The state of suspension mentioned earlier in the present review marks not only the fate of American Indian writers, but that of their exegetes as well. This brings us to the important question of methodology and critical tools. The authors of *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* are conscious of the significance of theory to literary scholarship and criticism; they also keep track of the changing tendencies which govern both. While they cannot—and probably should not—avoid referring to the oral tradition, which, as they note, is simultaneously central to Native American literature and somewhat overexploited by its scholars, they transcend it by adopting a wide range of approaches. The final result is a rich and varied volume whose trademarks may be said to be plurality and pluralism. Significantly, the monographers realize one of the many dilemmas marking the study of indigenous literatures: using established critical tools and techniques as well as seminal theoretical concepts inevitably means drawing on a tradition which is that of the conquerors and colonizers. Still, to ignore the Western literary and cultural tradition—and everything it entails—would be to solipsize the

scope of the critical reading. The contributors to *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* manage to find a golden mean. The legacy of modernism, one of the reference points in Marek Paryż's compelling comparative study of two works by Momaday, reappears in the volume's other essays, in which William Faulkner's name recurs. While the modernist context is important, that of postmodernism, as the monographers know, may be said to be vital. Since the volume deals with literature produced from the late 1960s onward, it is hardly surprising that several articles emphasize its postmodernist dimension: this is the case with Barbara Leftih's analysis of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* or Ewa Łuczak's highly readable discussion of another novel by the same author, *Master Butcher's Singing Club*. Postmodernism is also directly relevant to the two essays on Gerald Vizenor, which, in addition, raise the question of a truly native critical and theoretical discourse, to be found in Vizenor's writings. Needless to say, the lens of post-colonial studies, at once self-evident and problematic, is evoked in *Pisarze pochodzenia etnicznego*.

The articles included in the collection may be varied—as are the perspectives they employ, but they are also held closely together by what, for want of a better phrase, I would refer to as recurrent critical themes. Among the many phenomena and notions the monographers identify as crucial to the object of their study are history, especially in its revised version, and memory, both collective and individual; myths, primarily Native American ones, but also European-made myths which draw on stereotypes and invite deconstruction; race and identity; exclusion, extermination, discrimination and assimilation; survival and trauma; the relevance of ideologies such colonialism, imperialism and capitalism on the one hand and Marxism on the other to the study of American Indian letters, cultural tradition and history; nature and religious beliefs; the omnipresent figure of the trickster and humor. The list is, of course, longer and infinitely more complex. Despite this complexity, *Pisarze pochodzenia indiańskiego* strikes the reader as a coherent and cohesive volume, which is always a challenge when it comes to multi-authored works.

In their choice of secondary sources, the contributors to the Polish-language monograph do not limit themselves to scholarly writings; they also reference reviews and the writers' media presence. It is also worth noting that most of the works by American Indian authors discussed in the collection have not been translated into Polish so far. Not only do the Polish scholars examine the American reception of indigenous literature, but they also pave the way for its reception in Poland, hitherto constrained by the language barrier. In this way, they initiate a discussion which, one may hope, will be as multifarious and polyphonic as Native American literature itself.

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Zuzanna Ładyga, ed. *Barth, Barthelme, Coover.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2015. 197 pages.

The collection of essays edited by Zuzanna Ładyga is the fifth volume of "Mistrzowie Literatury Amerykanskiej," a series of companions to major American writers published at the University of Warsaw. The previous volumes have covered Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, Cormac McCarthy, and Native American authors. The present one consists of ten essays on John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and Robert Coover. Apart from the essays, there is a general introduction by Zuzanna Ładyga, who has edited the volume, contributed two articles, and authored three short biographical sketches. Although Barth, Barthelme, and Coover were translated into Polish, and often discussed in Polish journals in the 1980s and 1990s, the present volume offers the Polish reader an opportunity to catch up with more recent criticism on the three authors. Hopefully, the book also prepares the ground for a revival of interest in their work among students and general readers.

The essays are invariably fine, but vary strikingly in scope and critical approach: from thematic readings of specific texts, through rhetorical close readings of selected texts, to synthetic discussions of sequences of texts, or of entire *oeuvres*. Of the three essays on Barth, Mikołaj Wiśniewski's informative thematic introduction to *The Sot-Weed Factor* evolves into a synthesis of Barth's early fiction in thematic terms, as existential novels about nihilism. Tomasz Basiuk's essay on *The End of the Road* is a rhetorical analysis of dialogic narration and polyphony, and Jagoda Dolińska presents a detailed explication of Barth's self-reflective and recursive language devices in *Lost in the Funhouse*. It is perhaps symptomatic that no essay focuses on Barth's more recent fiction: Barth's self-reflective narratives written after 1968 (six novels and five collections), for all their recursive loops, self-thematic comments, and occurrences of objectified language, could not be described as radically innovative, not after *Lost in the Funhouse*. This is an observation wryly made by Jonathan Raban in 1991 in his review of *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor*: "Mr. Barth has been here before. As a work of loyal parody, *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* falls some way short of *The Sot-Weed Factor*. The literary theory that keeps it on the boil does not deviate from the program Mr. Barth laid down in the 1960's" ("The Sloop of Araby").

In the section on Donald Barthelme, Tadeusz Pióro's essay is an ingenious interpretation of a few selected short stories, treated as if they were poems. Zuzana Ładyga has written the two other essays in the section on Barthelme, both devoted to his novels: a surprising discussion of *Snow White* and *The Dead Father* as super-advanced and self-conscious versions of realist representation, and an analysis of historical narratology as theme in *Paradise* and *The King*. Ładyga demonstrates that Barthelme's fiction is not just a set of non-referential language games, but can generate political

and historical meanings, and contains self-reflective observations on the link between narrative conventions and political themes. At present, this way of reading Barthelme can certainly make his work more relevant and accessible for students, and for the general readership.

The section on Coover consists of four essays. Marek Paryż presents a historical synthesis of Coover's early novels as examples of transition and blending between realism to metafiction; Paryż presents metafiction as a dialectical development in which realism and metafiction are interdependent. A more radical view, indicated in the essay, would be that metafiction is a parasitic convention, developing on the substructure of realism, and dependent on realism for its own survival. Justyna Kociatkiewicz's essay is a thematic explication of *The Public Burning*, analyzing the rich texture of stylistic devices used by Coover to amplify the themes of violence, power, deception, and dominance, as the defining qualities of American politics and international policy. Patrycja Antoszek discusses Coover's aesthetic of excess in *Gerald's Party*, and interprets it in terms of Kristeva's notion of the abject. Finally, Zofia Kolbuszewska's essay on posthumanism in *Pinocchio in Venice* is an analysis of the transhuman imagery in the novel: animated paintings and non-human characters, with their marvelous capacity to function as images in a book, function also as images of a posthuman realism, defined in Lacanian terms as realization of the ekphrastic desire. This essay, as Zuzanna Ładyga observes in the introduction to the volume, focuses on the important quality shared by the three postmodernists: their fascination with an objectified and animated language, gaining a life of its own, before the startled eyes of the reader.

The introduction by the editor touches upon the important question of the waning interest in postmodern American fiction among Polish readers and publishers. In the age of Jonathan Franzen and Cormac McCarthy, not to mention George R. R. Martin and Stephen King, whoever reads a postmodern book? Ładyga provides a survey of possible reasons, amply discussed in recent criticism: that postmodernism was the cultural logic of late capitalism (which supposedly puts readers off), that the experiments of the 1960s and 1970s have become commonplace, that pop culture nowadays has appropriated postmodern aesthetics (especially irony and self-reference), and routinely offers products that surpass old postmodern experiments in brilliance and lushness, and perhaps that the tradition, which the postmodernists tried to undermine in the 1960s, is gone for good, so there is nothing left to undermine now. Thus, their work is to contemporary literature, what textbook science is to engineering: in view of the fact that some widely-read authors (such as Paul Auster or Don DeLillo) are described as postmodernists, the un-popular ones (such as Barth, Barthelme, and Coover), might be described as writers' writers, and their fiction, as it were, consists of concentrated experimental solutions, which can be diluted into palatable and more marketable products. The editor also mentions the essay by Patrycja Baran and Andrzej Antoszek, who, fourteen years ago, already described postmodern fiction as a closed historical

episode, which curiously resembles the mysterious and prophetic observations made by Wellek and Warren in 1948 that modernism (and its anticipations) was an anomalous phenomenon in the history of literary genres:

> One might be inclined to give up genre history after the eighteenth century—on the ground that formal expectations, repetitive structural patterns, have largely gone out. Such a hesitation recurs in the French and German writing about genre, together with the view that 1840–1940 is probably an anomalous literary period, and that we shall doubtless return to some more genre-constituted literature in the future. (242–243)

In the Polish context, however, there seems to be a rather disquieting political edge to the decline of interest in Barth, Barthelme, and Coover. Rather than a shift in aesthetic sensibilities, the decline is perhaps indicative of a wider, tectonic syncline forming now in Polish history, when many forms of public expression (literature, education, politics) are increasingly lacking in finesse, sense of humor, self-parody, amenability, and tolerance. The three authors are rather unlikely to function well in a country whose education is increasingly dominated by dogmatic obedience to authorities, and whose politics seems to be tainted by fits of melancholic, self-pitying paranoia. Perhaps correspondingly, in the Polish publishing market there seems to be more interest in Cormac McCarthy's half-concealed cult of violence, or in Toni Morrison's meditations on historical trauma, and in Thomas Pynchon's conspiracy theories, or in Richard Powers's dark prophecies. Barth, Barthelme, and Coover (as well as such forgotten fogeys as Ronald Sukenick, Raymond Federman, or Harry Mathews, or David Markson, who apparently has not even been published in Polish)—they were popular, if at all, in the 1990s, during the Polish festival of freedom and hope. To the disciplined cadres of transnational corporations, or to the convinced activists of radical movements, they must seem to be a rather outdated and infantile herd of dinosaurs: the white, middle-class, good-natured men, morally ambivalent, reflexive, and given to aesthetic ruptures over objectified language. Does the Polish readership have any room for them now?

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Peter Swirski, *American Political Fictions: War on Errorism in Contemporary American Literature, Culture, and Politics*. New York: Palgrave, 2015. 214 pages.

"America is not an overarching synthesis, *a pluribus unum*, but a rhetorical battleground, a symbol that has been made to stand for diverse and sometimes mutually contradictory outlooks" (Bercovitch 355). This statement by Sacvan Bercovitch might be a starting point for Peter Swirski's deliberations on the role of political fictions in literature, culture, and politics on the American scene. Swirski's main premise is that one can effectively reach a vital outlook on America's self-depictions by analyzing its political art. Thus, in the first chapter of his book *American Political Fictions* Swirski devotes much attention to analyzing key actors shaping current political discourse in America. The canvas for his analysis is Joseph Heller's book *Picture This*—although published in 1988, it still offers an informed perspective and allows a number of significant comparisons. After Heller, Swirski draws parallels between ancient Athens, with its democratic system of governing, and the US, which he deems an inheritor of the system. Both systems were built, in his opinion, on exploitation, colonialism, domination, and enslavement. In both systems there were leaders whose aim was to convince the compatriots to follow their path. In order to narrow it down to the system that he is most familiar with, Swirski gives examples of two significant aspects of the current American reality: war on terrorism and the Patriot Act. Both were introduced in order to curtail citizens' freedoms but also to rhetorically challenge other countries to take sides: either to support America in its fight against terrorism or to side with the terrorists, as this alternative was rhetorically constructed. Swirski also observes a deterioration of the social and cultural fabrics, which he attributes to hugely increased spendings on the military at the cost of health, education, and the internal wellbeing of the nation.

Another field that disunites American society is religion in its specific aspect—Christian fundamentalism manifested in dispensationalism. What stems from a long-lasting tradition of prophesying and writing apocalypse is an urge for radical conservative differentiation into us—always good and righteous, and them—the bad guys. So is the world depicted in an influential book by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. The authors and other vocal evangelicals such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell spot the evil not only in organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union but also in what they currently deem the worst threat of all—atheistic humanism. This, in turn, provides a pretext for Swirski to claim that there is a direct relationship between the country's religiosity and the level of its social dysfunctions—the higher the level, the more religious the country. On the one hand, since the number of Robertson's and Falwell's television audience exceeds one hundred million viewers plus the readership of LaHaye and

Jenkins, Swirski suggests that social ills in America must be widespread, on the other, it testifies to the fact that for those millions of people who remain under the influence of Christian fundamentalism, public life and politics in the US appear to be, as he calls it, "cliffpocalypsemageddonacaust."

Another bestselling book, *A Planet for the President* by Alistair Beaton provides a satirical commentary on the previous administration in the White House, widely echoed by Swirski, and it inspires him to compare and contrast two administrations—Bush Jr.'s and Obama's. Swirski blames the former for the war on terror, which led to practically indiscriminate and unrestrained surveillance of Americans' lives, thus making the superior law of the country—the Constitution—good for nothing, and for sending military troops overseas to instigate Pax Americana even at the cost of going against the vernacular forms of government. Almost totally neglected environmental issues with their most conspicuous aspect—global warming—add to the former administration's deficits. Surprisingly, Barack Obama, who was running for American presidency as a great advocate of change, in Swirski's eyes remained resolute on these issues, too. In fact, as he claims, relying on the opinions of Obama's military officials, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate did not live up to the standards vested on him by the gravity of the Prize.

The last two chapters of the book are devoted to Rap, which Swirski decodes as Rhyming American Poetry, and the influence that the highly popular TV series *The West Wing* exerts on the Americans. He calls the former "an objective correlative of the United States," borrowing the phrase from T.S. Eliot, seeing it as an oxymoron that contains such mutually contradictory qualities as individualism and communitarianism, capitalism and socialism, political and apolitical, materialist and idealist, etc. Its grandest asset is its authenticity pertaining to ordinary lives of the American people. Just like the music, for numerous Americans the TV series is a source of information they obtain about politics. This lets Swirski draw conclusions on the deteriorating quality of political life and decline in civic engagement, which he attributes to Americans' atomization, loneliness, and estrangement. As a remedy, he puts forward the example of Swiss democracy, whose major strength is the delegation of power to the people. This seems to be a call for the idea of participatory democracy as postulated by young Americans in the 1960s. As he claims, "once the direct democracy genie is once released from the bottle, it is hard to put it back." The question is, however, whether American reality lives up to this statement.

All in all, *American Political Fictions* is a good read for those who want to obtain a broader insight into American political, social, and cultural realities. Swirski's analysis is well-grounded in facts, based on sound research (the list of bibliographical items exceeds 20 pages) and rich in interpretations. The caliber of questions that he poses and the quality of answers and formulas that he offers his readers will enlighten their political preferences and help understand the influence that political, social, and cultural propaganda has on their lives.

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Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis. *The Southern Mystique: Food, Gender, and Houses in Southern Fiction and Films*. València: Universitat de València, Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans, 2012. 171 pages.

For those who wish to re/embark upon the notion of "Dixie" as a brand southern name with a lot of—un/typically female—mystique to it, this book poses as a fine challenge. This is because *The Southern Mystique*, a collection of seven essays reprinted by the Author from their original sources, traces the contemporary re/construction of the ways of the in/famous southern femininity. By making use of various, contemporary and past, theoretical approaches to the always volatile concept of (southern) femininity (e.g. feminist literary criticism, psychoanalytic theory, or theories of space, grotesque, and carnival), Niewiadomska-Flis re/negotiates this concept in such a way that it appears, to use media expert Lev Manovich's word, "elastic" ("What Is Digital Cinema") and hence, a broadly understood peculiar affective-performative dynamics rather than a coherent structure.

The Author, a southern literature expert, attains this effect by pitting southern femininity as it is performed in ample non/southern film and fiction against the non/material phenomena which this femininity customarily underwrites. Food preparation, women's friendships, their "place" in marriage, the home, or society, female bodies, even houses—all these practices the southern women from the analyzed works activate at some point as un/conscious performances of their identities. In a very forthright and clear way, Niewiadomska-Flis demonstrates not only how the dynamics of such female performances becomes operative, but also how it gains its affective value thus becoming a salient agent in southern women's identity re/configuration.

For example, the first essay in the collection, entitled "The Gastrodynamics of Edna Pontellier's Liberation," assuming culinary practices to be agentive in the construction of southern womanhood, analyzes the presentation of such practices in Kate Chopin's groundbreaking novel, *The Awakening* (1899), as indicative of the crisis of the protagonist's female self. The Author convincingly argues for the various types of food, such as e.g. chocolate or fish, or rituals of meal-serving, to be emblematic of

Edna Pontellier's disintegration as a southern woman while at the same time serving her liberation from the patriarchal strictures of marriage. Niewiadomska-Flis does not, however, identify foodways as a performance of instinctual gender boundary testing. In her essay "Negotiating Gender with a Spatula: Foodways and Gender in *Fried Green Tomatoes*," she presents yet another fascinating analysis of the food references in the well-known novel by Fannie Flag as a conscious female strategy of order-changing.

Niewiadomska-Flis suggests that he cognitive process of preparation and consumption of food becomes affective at the moment it is embraced as "mothering the mind" by the women involved in it. As such, food activities turn out to be symptomatic of the greater process of "female bonding" which the Author refers to in the collection's third essay entitled "Bonding and Moving On: Southern Female Companions in Motion (Pictures)," a discussion of southern womanhood's dynamics of self-recognition. This and the following essay, "Female Friendship and a Narration of Self-Discovery in Twentieth-Century Southern Women's Writing," which demonstrates the process of female bonding through befriending and eventually developing an affection for another woman, shed light on how the *Bildungsroman* of southern womanhood changes in terms of perennial boundary breaking, understood, however, not so much as a psychological process but rather as a spiritual, *ergo*, an artistic performance of, as it were, the "writing beyond ending" woman's self.

Such a "gothic"—i.e. allowing for the female connection even "across the threshold of life and death," as the Author claims—staging of southern womanhood as expository of its own "fissures and… secret chambers" (Williams 175), allows for its re/configuration also in terms of the "fearful, alien, excluded or dangerously marginal" (Briggs 125). The remaining three essays in the collection: "Subverting the Patriarchal Paradigm of Gender Relations in Ellen Glasgow's Gothic Short Stories," "The Grotesque Female Body: The Gothic Household and Sexual Politics in Twentieth-Century Southern Short Fiction," and "The Fall of the House of the Elite: A Reading of Southern Aristocracy Through the Architectural Correlative" analyze southern femininity precisely as a gothic phenomenon; a view which enables a perception of the southern feminine as a grotesque and, eventually, carnivalesque construct. Niewiadomska-Flis shows this by making southern womanhood operative within the context of the female mental illness, spinsterhood, and last but not least, the house such a mentally and physically "carnivalesque" female "body" occupies.

Accordingly, accepting the claim of Mary Russo that the human body is the "prototype of society" (320), the Author shows how the "ugly" side of the southern community embodied both by the sick, the old, or the single females and the dilapidating houses they inhabit can be turned into a performance of the "decadence, maladjustment, and isolationism of the declining [southern] aristocracy" (*The Southern Mystique* 152). Thus orchestrating southern womanhood into, to paraphrase Thomas Elsaesser, a "pattern

of (a)e(s)th(et)ic(al) self-significance" (82), Niewiadomska-Flis makes it agentive in re/configuring also the southern identity in the modal terms of the "ethical and creative potential of the expressive body" (Del Rio 16).

Niewiadomska-Flis has done a remarkable job bringing together all these diverse performances of southern womanhood as one *élan vital*, as it were. Analyzing the southern womanhood as a fluid southern force, Niewiadomska-Flis makes it further adaptable—and thus, part of another field of studies: adaptation. This is visible in the way she approaches the subject matter of the collection, as she deals with both cinematic and literary narratives. It is a pity, then, that, when speaking about the South in film, Niewiadomska-Flis omits most of the aspects of film analysis, so different from literary investigation. Despite this lack—or perhaps because it—there is no doubt that, as it is, the collection does encourage a pursuit of further critical inquiry.

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