

REVIEWS

Robert W. Hamblin. *Critical Essays on William Faulkner*. UP of Mississippi, 2022, 321 pages.

In the preface to his 2020 monograph *The Saddest Words: William Faulkner's Civil War* Michael Gorra describes his initial reaction to *As I Lay Dying* which he read as a young teacher in a summer school: "I didn't much like it, not at first. I felt disoriented by the speed with which Faulkner switched from one first-person narrator to another.... But some things stuck. One of the book's narrators told me that 'words don't even fit even what they are trying to say at,' and another announced that 'My mother is a fish.' I'd never read anything like it, and knew after my first class that I wanted to read more" (2-3). And here is Robert W. Hamblin talking about his first impressions of the novel (the words are taken from one of The Oprah Book Club lectures that Hamblin delivered in 2005): "I was simply amazed at the unusual way Faulkner chose to tell the story. All those characters, jumping around in time, each telling his or her own version of the events, sometimes collaborating, sometimes contradicting each other.... I found the technique daring, innovative, provocative, awesome" (*Critical Essays* 152-153).

I'm putting these two statements together because they demonstrate the kind of power that Faulkner's prose may have on its readers and critics. One could add that this power is very often combined with fascination. Reading Faulkner's best novels for the first time is no doubt an extraordinary experience. They provide us with original and exciting new ways of looking at the human reality as well as the mysteries of the human heart. Also, they talk to us in the language, and through forms, which is (are) both inventive and imaginative, colloquial and highly experimental. As the two quotes show, Faulkner's charismatic prose has lost nothing of its appeal and persuasive force. In the case of Michael Gorra, one of the most perceptive readers of the Oxford novelist, fascination is sometimes mixed with reserve and occasional disapproval as when the critic accuses the novelist of inaccurate representations of race in his readings of Southern history. In Robert W. Hamblin's recently published *Critical Essays on William Faulkner* there are mainly tones of praise and appreciation. They are heard in most of the analyses and interpretations, leaving us with a strong urge to read Faulkner once again. Hamblin loves Faulkner—and we easily sympathize with him.

The name of Robert W. Hamblin is (or at least should be) familiar to all those interested in Faulkner criticism. He is the author of a recent biography of the novelist (*Myself and the World*, 2016). He co-authored and co-edited (with Charles Peek) *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia*, a highly readable and still unexampled book published in 1999. Last but not least, in 1989 he became the founding director of the Center for Faulkner Studies at Southeast Missouri State University where he had taught and lectured since 1965 (as it is, the Center was established after the SMS University acquired a huge mass of Faulkner documents from Louis Daniel

Brodsky, a Faulkner scholar and Hamblin's friend). I think we are justified in saying that *Critical Essays on William Faulkner* is in some measure a summary and culmination of his research work on the great novelist. A useful and enjoyable book, it comprises twenty one essays published between 1980 and 2020, with topics ranging from myths to symbolical forms, from analyses of Faulkner's novelistic technique to the psychology of his characters, from native Albany to distant Hollywood. The great asset of the volume is no doubt its diversity—Faulkner is approached from different perspectives and by different critical routes. Importantly, Hamblin leaves many of his interpretative questions open, which lets the readers come up with their own propositions and insights about individual texts and the work as whole.

As I have just noticed, what links the subsequent essays is the critic's lifelong fascination with Faulkner's oeuvre. There is also remarkable critical accuracy as Hamblin is attentive to details and nuances of the texts he is interpreting. Certain themes and motifs recur, of course in different critical constellations. One of the most important ideas in the book is that of the decisive role of creative imagination which recreates the world (after all, the novelist's imaginary Yoknapatawpha epitomizes real places, people and events) and helps us see it in its essence and momentum. In an essay on *Absalom, Absalom!* Hamblin describes Faulkner's work as a "celebration of the superiority of an art over life" (58). Obviously, we should not take this assertion too literally—the novelist was always faithful to life in all its aspects—but the critic is right in stressing the artistic range and angle of such works as *The Sound and the Fury* or *Light in August*. In the same essay Hamblin ponders on the relationship between art and life as "paradoxical" (47) and "dialectic" (48)—both adjectives are helpful as they point to the dynamism and vitality of Faulkner's best novels and short stories.

Another big theme explored in the book is the mastery with which Faulkner handles the novelistic form and literary conventions, as well as his subtle use of rhetorical effects. For Hamblin this is not just writerly expertise. Both the structure and the rhythm of the novel may be in fact seen as protective strategies; Faulkner would agree with W. B. Yeats who considered his speculative treatise *A Vision* a "last act of defence against the chaos of the world" (qtd in Foster 280). At one moment Hamblin notices: "I suggest that the key to Faulkner's theory of fiction is to be found in his statement.... that writing was his way of saying No to death" (23; the statement appears in *Requiem for a Nun*). Indeed, if we can speak of a Faulknerian theory of the creative process, one of its most distinctive features would be an emphasis on temporality and mortality (we could say that writing is synonymous with both). The form and language have for Faulkner existential value and meaning; acts of constructing and narrating are already existential gestures.

Several of Hamblin's essays deal with literary and textual parallels. Significantly, these are much shorter than the other essays, and probably not as satisfactory. It would be no exaggeration to say that Faulkner was not interested in literary history. Of course he had his favorite authors (Dostoyevsky, Twain or Conrad, to mention just a few) but what he found in them was just a confirmation of his own insights. He did not have to refer to them as potential sources. His life,

his social and natural environment were all he cared for. This may be the reason why most of the comparative and intertextual efforts that we find in Hamblin's book seem a bit contrived. There are some high points, though. One is a brisk essay in which Hamblin juxtaposes *The Sound and the Fury* and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* ("Did You Ever Have a Sister?' Holden Caulfield and Quentin Compson"). Another one ("The World Is like an Enormous Spider Web': The Contrasting Legacies of Thomas Sutpen and Cass Mastern") provides a convincing comparison of Thomas Sutpen (*Absalom, Absalom!*) and Cass Mastern, a 19th-century ancestor of Jack Burden, the narrator of Robert Penn Warren's 1946 novel *All the King's Men*. Faulkner had a rather low opinion of Warren's book (as a matter of fact, he called it "second-rate") and flatly refused to write a blurb when asked by the publishers of the novel. The one thing he did like about the story was Warren's memorable characterization of Cass Mastern ("a beautiful and moving piece.... The rest I would throw away"; qtd in Hamblin 265). Hamblin follows this clue and offers us some interesting parallels between the two characters. To be sure, such juxtapositions run the risk of banality and are sometimes fruitless (or even trivial) as interpretative strategies. But not in this case. The critic succeeds in showing us what in particular drew Faulkner to the character of Mastern and, perhaps more interestingly, why the author of *Sanctuary* was essentially mistaken in condemning Warren's novel as a whole.

Of particular interest is the 2014 essay entitled "Faulkner and Hollywood: A Call for Reassessment." This may be the most important text in the collection, and it is certainly a significant contribution to the Faulkner Studies. Above all, it opens a fresh critical perspective upon Faulkner's work, the one that has been either overlooked or simply ignored. Surely, there have been critics writing about the novelist's Hollywood career (the MGM in the 1930s and the Warner Bros during the early 1940s), but they almost always concentrated on biographical details and approached the subject as perihelal. The writer himself admitted in a letter to Malcolm Cowley that he kept his "movie work locked off into another room" from his fiction (qtd in Hamblin 206). As Hamblin convincingly demonstrates, this view might be challenged on many counts. As it is, "Faulkner's time and work in Hollywood and the characters, plots, and themes of his fiction are more closely intertwined than is generally recognized" (210). And: "The intersections of Faulkner's film work and his fiction work both forward and backward: not only does some of his scriptwriting subsequently find its way into his fiction, but also material from his fiction is occasionally woven into his movie treatments and scripts" (209). Hamblin provides a lot of evidence which hammer home his point (I refer the reader to the essay). Interestingly, he sees *Pylon* (1934)—which according to many critics is Faulkner's minor work—as a transitional or even breakthrough novel which absorbed many "filmic" effects and helped the writer work out the quasi-movie style that can be felt in many of his later fictions (let us think of the sensational elements in *Intruder in the Dust* or the amazing first scene of *A Fable*). As the critic has it, the novel is "pure Hollywood" (212). No wonder it was easily translated into the acclaimed movie *The Tarnished Angels* (directed by Douglas Sirk in 1957). It should be added that Faulkner was a skilled screenwriter who

very quickly learned the secrets of the trade. Particularly interesting was his collaboration with the director Howard Hawks with whom he worked on such movies as *To Have and Have Not* (based on Hemingway's novel) and *The Big Sleep*, an adaptation of Raymond Chandler's mystery thriller (the US National Film Preservation Board deemed the movie "culturally, historically and aesthetically significant" and included it in the National Film registry at the Library of Congress). Hamblin concludes his fine essay with a "heightened appreciation" of both Faulkner's screenplays and his later fiction, seeing in the latter an intriguing demonstration of the cinematic sensibility.

Critical Essays on William Faulkner deserves a few readings. The book has its occasional faults: there are unnecessary digressions and repetitions; from time to time we come across vague, declarative statements bordering on commonplace; also, we should be prepared for a certain triteness of argument. Basically, though, the essays are elegantly written and critically competent, adding up to produce a rich portrait of the novelist and his work. What is worth emphasising is the critic's openness to different theoretical approaches and points of view. The net result is a candid, balanced and credible study of one of the greatest American writers of the *twentieth* century.

Works Cited

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Neil Campbell. *Worlding the Western: Contemporary US Western Fiction and the Global Community*. U of Nevada P, 2022, 272 pages.

Neil Campbell's most recent book, *Worlding the Western: Contemporary US Western Fiction and the Global Community*, contains critical essays analyzing ten works of fiction about the US West published within the last ten years. The selection of pieces for the volume attests to the scholar's long-standing conviction that the US West is a region which is better understood not as a closed off arena dedicated to American nation-building but as a vast multicultural meeting place where people with different backgrounds and goals relate to one another in various ways to painstakingly forge a community. The works of fiction examined in this book subvert the framework, tropes, and motifs typical of the myth of the West, yet nonetheless employ them to highlight a different perspective. The Western genre provides as if an agora for every single authorial voice, which comes from either within (e.g., the Native voices of R. W. Kimmerer, LeAnne Howe, and Tommy Orange) or from without the United States (e.g., from Ireland), to present their singular take. In their representations of the West, the novels simultaneously employ and draw attention away from familiar characters, situations, and ideas to narrate a plethora of hitherto untouched, unheard, silenced, underplayed, mocked, or ignored stories.

Throughout his interdisciplinary book publications (Campbell writes about both literature and culture) about the postwar American West: *The Cultures of the American New West* (2000), *The Rhizomatic West* (2008), *Post-Westerns: Cinema, Region, West* (2013), *Affective Critical Regionality* (2016), and *Under the Western Sky* (2018, as editor and contributor), Campbell has argued that western American culture and literature gain more from postcolonial, transnational and transcultural analysis than from ideas associated with the historical discourse of the unique nation-building qualities of the frontier, Manifest Destiny, and exceptionalism. However, this most recent publication is the most politically engaged one of them all as it comes in direct response to Donald Trump's presidency and his radical right-wing politics of sealing the American borders against immigrants and isolating the country from the rest of the world by pulling it out of various international organizations and agreements. Erecting the wall on the US-Mexico border was the ultimate sign of the former president's desire to keep the rest of the world separate while he, famously employing a random selection of ideas from the myth of the West that particularly suited his ends (including the figure of John Wayne), single-handedly made America great again. "The writers I'm talking about, the novels I write about were putting the world back [into America] in all kinds of ways," says the author (Campbell, YouTube). Campbell's aim in producing the book was to demonstrate that America is not a single vision but that it remains open and complicated in the eyes of a range of contemporary western fiction writers and to advocate for a new kind of politics based on care, "public love" (Solnit qtd. in Campbell 193), and a sense of community.

The novels discussed in *Worlding the Western* comprise the following: *In the Distance* (2017) by Hernan Diaz, *Days Without End* (2016) by Sebastian Barry, *Inland* (2019) by Téa Obreht, *How Much of These Hills Is Gold* (2020) by C. Pam Zhang, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) by Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Choctalking on Other Realities* (2013) and *Savage Conversations* (2019) by LeAnne Howe, *There There* (2018) by Tommy Orange, *Lost Children Archive* (2019) by Valeria Luiselli, and *Exit West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid. Many of the authors come from outside the United States or are immigrants; for example Valeria Luiselli comes from Mexico, Sebastian Barry is an Irish writer, Téa Obreht is a Serbian American who moved to the United States when she was 12 years old, and Hernan Diaz was born in Argentina, raised in Argentina and Sweden and now lives in New York. Through their diverse backgrounds and transnational experience, the writers literally introduce the world into the western formula. They instill the genre with their sensibilities and traditions, compile its fresh versions with a different distribution of focal points, and scramble what used to be a pattern of well-known themes with predictable outcomes. They make the Western, in Campbell's words, a "traveling" genre.

What contributes to making *Worlding the Western* an important statement not only within the field of western American studies but also, more widely, in contemporary debates on the ways of going forward with shaping the future of the world, is its grounding in philosophical and critical thought. Campbell constructs the framework, or the "theoretical echo chamber" (Campbell 189), that supports

his analysis primarily through the works of Édouard Glissant, Rob Wilson, and Jean-Luc Nancy but also through those by Bruno Latour, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, in addition enriching his argument by citing a number of postcolonial writers and critics, including Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Rebecca Solnit, Kathleen Stewart, and Amitav Ghosh, whose metaphor “the great derangement” Campbell uses to describe and emphasize his opposition to the separatist, exclusive nationalism of Trumpian politics.

There is a precise meaning that Campbell ascribes to the term “worlding.” Understanding the critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s usage of the notion when she commented on a “global colonial process” (Campbell 10) taking place across the world in the twentieth century is key to comprehend Campbell’s, who uses it in a different way and makes the distinction clear at the beginning of the book. In the Introduction, he writes, “As in [Frederick Jackson] Turner’s sense of an ‘uninscribed’ territory or ‘free land’ waiting to be written over by pioneer settlers, Spivak’s notion of ‘worlding’ is about imposition, surveying, or naturalizing what was, in reality, inscribed there already” (10). In other words, in Spivak’s discourse, “worlding” denotes furnishing what is perceived as an empty space with the colonizer’s view of the world and system of values while ignoring, diminishing, or perceiving as absent the cultures of the colonized. Following Jean-Luc Nancy, Campbell further reflects that this kind of “negative colonial worlding” (11) is more akin to what we understand today as globalization—the indiscriminate superimposition of western culture (that identified with the Occident) and capitalism on other cultures across the world. But Campbell’s “worlding,” following Édouard Glissant, is positive in that it disrupts the idea of a single, dominant world and “bring[s] forth” (21; emphasis in the original) into dialogue all the worlds that have been erased. In Campbell’s words, “Reclaiming worlding in this context envisages an entangled process by which the intimate, small-scale, and local everyday worlds of people, place, and nonhuman species relate to and dialogize with larger global concerns” (11). Thus, relationality, interchange, and conversation are key processes that accompany the kind of positive worlding deployed by Campbell. The works of fiction selected to be analyzed in the volume focus on different stories than “the world of frontier mythology, patriarchal control, white supremacy, and violent repression in the US West” (21). They attest to the possibility of a creative dispersal (traveling) and morphing of the western genre to include those other stories, or worlds.

Worlding the Western, following *The Rhizomatic West* and *Affective Critical Regionality*, expresses an insightful statement that is consistent in approach with the author’s previous publications about US western literature and culture. It is a continuation and a further elaboration of the scholar’s argument that the US West is so much more than the single story of the myth of the frontier and Manifest Destiny. Through its discussion of the selected works of fiction—from Hakan’s wanderings in circles across the West in Hernan Diaz’s *In the Distance*, through Native tribalography, to the building of an “errant community” (179; emphasis in the original) in Hamid’s *Exit West*—the book successfully establishes that there

exists a multitude of other relevant visions that expand the western genre and that need to be reckoned with in any analysis of western American literature going forward.

Work Cited

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Lawrence P. Jackson. *Hold It Real Still: Clint Eastwood, Race, and the Cinema of the American West*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2022, 300 pages.

Lawrence P. Jackson's *Hold It Real Still: Clint Eastwood, Race, and the Cinema of the American West* examines the representation of Blackness in film Westerns starring Clint Eastwood and its resonance in more recent Hollywood productions in the genre. Eastwood's launch into stardom at the turn of the 1960s and 70s coincided with a series of social and political crises which created a need for a new epitome of the nation, one that would bring an end to the turmoil and promise a new order, based on clearly defined hierarchies. Eastwood readily embraced this role. The pursuit of such a collective fantasy signified regression in the domain of race relations. On the example of selected Westerns featuring Eastwood and several more recent Westerns, Jackson shows that D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* still haunts the American cinematic imagination.

Chapter One focuses on the opposition between John Wayne's and Clint Eastwood's respective filmic personas that made them icons of the Western genre. Jackson sees the Wayne persona as emblematic of mid-century racial liberalism, which advocated interracial contact as a remedy for the social ills resulting from segregationist policies. It did not promote radical changes but rather aimed to quench Black Americans' anger, mainly caused by economic inequality, by creating the illusion of a more just social order. The paternalistic aura emanating from the Wayne persona bespeaks a longing for the kind of social stability that allows every member of the community to feel that this is where they belong, whatever their individual backgrounds. Wayne was often cast in the roles of spokesmen for the disfranchised, but his performances as a community leader were no less representative with regard to racial liberalism. The heroism of the Wayne persona has a lot to do with his readiness to sacrifice himself for the well-being of others. Manifestations of social unrest in the late 60s and early 70s, including race riots, undermined the plausibility of racial liberalism. The spread of social antagonisms created a demand for a new type of the Western hero, a projection of a desired hierarchy of power. And this is what the Eastwood persona came to represent. It was a process which culminated with the release of *The Outlaw Josey Wales* in 1976, the film that would define Eastwood's stance on the problem of race.

Jackson argues that the supremacist Eastwood persona begins to take shape in Sergio Leone's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966)—the subject of his discussion in Chapter Two—but the resonance of this creation is limited because of a powerful on-screen presence that counterbalances its appeal, that of Eli Wallach's character Tuco. Being a mestizo, Tuco embodies the complex history of the land that made him with its legacy of colonial violence and shifting borders. As an alien element in the Manichean formula of the Western that pits good against evil, he functions as a mediator whose gestures, behaviors and actions erode the traditional moral hierarchies of the genre by opening a space for nuances of history. It is Tuco's eponymous ugliness that provides an aesthetic clue to the film's displacement of the generic narrative of the Western. His ugliness reminds us about his status as a colonized, but at the same time Wallach's exaggerated performance signifies Tuco's striving for agency. This striving is tellingly reflected in a series of transactions that Tuco enters with Eastwood's Blondie. A stand-in for a slave in a post-Civil-War landscape devoid of Blacks, Tuco embodies a search for a form of enfranchisement within the dominant economic order. On the other hand, Blondie is symbolically associated with slave owners through his fixation on profit. The film's focus on the transactional nature of the relations between the main characters dispels the illusions of social consensus.

Chapters Three and Four concern *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, which Jackson considers as Eastwood's pivotal achievement. The critic points out that its allegorization of the Vietnam War, consisting in the association of the American failure in Vietnam with the Lost Cause of the South, establishes the image of the South as an invaded territory. It thus reinvents a southern version of heroism, an effect all the more conspicuous given the film's concrete historical setting in comparison with Eastwood's earlier "anachronistic" Westerns, as Jackson describes them (91), set in vaguely defined times and places. The critic emphasizes the significance of the motif of the massacre of the southern guerillas in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, the motif that almost perversely reimagines power relations in the post-bellum South by blurring the difference between victims and oppressors. The film portrays a social reality virtually devoid of Black people, therefore the guerillas ultimately come to embody a predicament analogous to that of Blacks. Jackson then analyzes a single series of shots that show Black soldiers posing for a photograph just before their departure west, which he sees as "a dynamic enactment of the white supremacist ideal of racial segregation and Black elision" (108). The erasure of Black presence is veiled by the dynamics of foreground and background that symbolically privileges white settler experience.

In the last three chapters Jackson demonstrates that Black representation remains a problematic issue in present-day film Westerns on the example of *Ride with the Devil* (dir. Ang Lee, 1999) and *Django Unchained* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2012). The former film yields an analogous effect to *The Outlaw Josey Wales* in eliciting the audiences sympathy for southern guerillas. Jackson writes: "For Lee, a Taiwanese immigrant whose films include several westerns and display an abiding interest in observations of white American life, the Civil War was emphatically an epic tragedy because of its fratricidal dimension, not on account of its abolitionist

result" (137). Although one of the film's main characters is Black and he functions as its moral center, his role has been primarily defined as that of a mediator between the young white protagonist and the perils of the world governed by the chaos of war. In turn, Jackson reads *Django Unchained* as an emanation of the Obama era which—in the critic's opinion—was characterized by spectacular moves that in essence concealed the status quo. Tarantino's representation of Blackness in *Django Unchained* corresponds with the politics of the day through its apparent radicalism. The critic discusses Tarantino's postmodern cinematic techniques to show that Django is a simulacrum of a Western hero, rather than such a hero in his own right. On the whole, the film depicts its Black characters as people without a shared legacy, their images typified for the purposes of the spectacle.

Although Clint Eastwood's cinematic persona has been analyzed in reference to white hegemonic masculinity numerous times, Lawrence P. Jackson has succeeded in establishing a new perspective on Eastwood's screen performances in the context of race. His book sheds light on larger mechanisms at work behind Hollywood's representations of Blackness in the past half a century. *Hold It Real Still* combines sophisticated formal analysis with the depth of historical and political insights. Jackson's discussions move smoothly between a range of contexts, from the Civil War and its aftermath, through race riots and the Civil Rights Movement, to presidential policies from Nixon to Obama. His reading of *Django Unchained* through the lens of Obama's rhetoric of race is a model analysis of the intersection of filmic representation and political discourse. Jackson uses illuminating examples to argue that old tropes of racial representation still resonate in American culture, e.g. he evokes John Singleton Copley's 1778 painting *Watson and the Shark*, the picture of a group of men, including one Black, in a boat attacked by a shark, to explain the dynamics of race relations in *Ride with the Devil*. *Hold It Real Still* is a fundamental contribution to the scholarship on constructions of race in the Western and in contemporary Hollywood in general.

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Carsten Schinko. *Sonic Fictions of America: Literature and Popular Music in the U.S. 1950–2010*. Universitätsverlag Winter, 2021, 528 pages.

Winter's American Studies monograph series' volume 315 brings Carsten Schinko's sprawling nine chapters in four parts on the topic of the relationship American literature has enacted with popular music and music culture(s) since the 1950s. The book responds to the growing interest in intermediality within the humanities. Among authors whose works Schinko studies are Ralph Ellison, Ann Patchett, Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis.

As Schinko declares, his subject is the literature as a form of communication "perpetually irritated" by appropriations from its medial others, in this case, the world of music and pop culture. Thus, Part II engages readings of Patchett and Ellison in relation to what Schinko calls "pre-pop" or the genres of classical and blues music respectively. In parts III and IV the author proposes to divide popular

music's history into two epochs: the first from Elvis to Altamont (DeLillo), the other marked by the arrival of such medial innovations as MTV, later, MP3 through the rise of the social media (Ellis). Interested in the literary work's integrity within a changeable media ecology Schinko inquires how this history underlies the literary productions' discussions of pop and depictions of pop as a fact of life.

These analyses are preceded by an Introduction and Part I in which the author takes time to review and appraise paradigms specific to the inquiry into literary texts producing effects resembling phenomena known from expression of music. In this way, he not only locates his study within a specific field of dialogic musico-literary critique and the studies of intermediality with their own seminal proponents (Werner Wolf, Uwe Wirth, and others) but also asserts his strength within this current when he points not only to useful nuances of Wolf's taxonomy in his *The Musicalization of Fiction* (1999) but also to its biases rooted in ontology of music's classical paradigm prioritizing notation. Drawing on Claus Ulrich Viol and others Schinko then suggests ways of broadening and transcending old frameworks of inquiry; he proposes to talk of, for example, transmediality, paraliterature, metaphoricity, social functionality, and, most importantly, the genre.

His meticulous breakdown of the theory of pop literature, heteromedial relations, medial clusters, sonic experiences and its perceptual consequences, etc., is impressive and classical and modern scholars are consulted including Jonathan Sterne, Roland Barthes, Theodor Adorno, Niklas Luhmann, Marshall McLuhan, Jacques Derrida, Mladen Dolar, Steven Feld, and countless others. The focus on popular culture brings concomitant discussions of authenticity as a paradoxical phenomenon of postmodernity, the concept of musiking (Christopher Small), the voice as the center of affectivity and, in an important extension of Barthes, the idea of sonic punctum based on the affective power of sounds, pop subjectivization as a dual formation of the subject, the concept of pop-modernity, and much more. The theoretical discussion is supported by numerous examples (Nick Hornby, Arthur Phillips) but running for over 120 pages the section feels lengthy and so thorough that it reads more like an academic dissertation rather than a book aimed for a broader market. Hence, Schinko's readership will largely be composed of intermedial specialists or/and students of individual authors discussed here.

Schinko's approach to literary studies through intermediality and transmediality is refreshing. Although he is interested in literature which is concerned with sound, he also understands that sound always interacts with sights, images, icons in the mediatized economy of communication, that media themselves are not transparent. His assertion is that to approach the world through "acustemology" or by prioritizing sound in our epistemological apparatus is to subvert the culturally constructed hierarchy of the senses. He asks what subjectivity is revealed from the perspective of the auditory world-making? We may ask: what does a research informed by such an apparatus of knowing reveal?

A good example of a productive, innovative outcome is offered in Schinko's study of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In an important contribution to the scholarship on the novel Schinko not only reads it through jazz but also asks about its genre. Pointing to the novel's dual lineage in the *Bildungsroman* and the (neo-)picaresque

traditions he links it to how jazz and classical music have rivaled. Equally, his reading of the vinyl record players motif in the novel's central scene underground draws attention to Ellison's medial questions which he links to the questions of cultural memory. The discussion itself could use more contributions by African American studies on jazz and blues influences in black literature. Houston A. Baker's paradigmatic *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (1984) is glaringly missing from the analysis although, curiously, Baker's book is listed in the Secondary Literature section. We can only speculate why Baker is here and not elsewhere, but the mistake is consistent with the overall poor quality of editing. The book contains many, if mostly insignificant then certainly annoyingly frequent typos, misspellings, clumsy word choices, missing propositions, wrong grammatical structures or syntax, missing diacritic signs, as well as some redundancies and repetitions. Speaking of editorial drawbacks, we can also mention Winter's outdated practice of leaving all non-English citations in their original language. Because Schinko's sources are to a large extent German the reader not familiar with the language finds herself/himself flipping the pages.

These shortcomings notwithstanding the overall result is impressive and highly engaging especially once we are past the theoretical section and find the wealth of authors and works discussed which go beyond the names inscribed on the spinning vinyl featured on the cover of the book. Apart from *Invisible Man* Schinko speaks eloquently of the intermedial interests in Patchett's *Bel Canto*. In inspired discussion of the Dionysian dynamics in Don DeLillo's *Great Jones Street* he compares the novel with short stories by T.C. Boyle, Joyce Carol Oates, and Julie Hecht. Finally, it is the comparison of Jonathan Lethem's two novels with Bret Easton Ellis' which helps him explain the trajectory or what Schinko calls the "drift" from inetermedial to transmedial aesthetics of pop literature. Scholars working on the authors listed above will be well-advised to consult Schinko's work. Those who study intermediality will now have to reckon with another classic.

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Astrid Böger and Florian Sedlmeier, editors. *U.S. American Culture as Popular Culture*. Universitätsverlag Winter, 2022, 563 pages.

U.S. American Culture as Popular Culture (2022), edited by Astrid Böger and Florian Sedlmeier, provides a collection of twenty seven academic texts, in which the authors share their insights into the current phenomena that can be observed in, or even constitute a portion of the American culture. As stated in the Introduction: "In line with Dewey's open and inclusive definition, the contributions to this volume discuss a wide range of cultural artefacts and their medial manifestations—including memes, hashtags, music, poetry, television formats (reality TV, fictional series, late-night shows, stand-up comedy specials), movies, novels, graphic novels, and video games" (12)— and, indeed, the material in the volume offers a plethora of cultural artifacts and phenomena, which are discussed from various points of view

and with the use of different methodological approaches. The contributions to the monograph are grouped into three sections: I. Film and Television, II. Literature, and III. Other Media and Art Formats.

In "I. Film and Television," the first three contributors take on the genre of the Western: Maxi Albrecht writes about the concepts of Westernness and post-Westernness of AMC's *The Walking Dead*; Abigail Fagan discusses the presence of settler colonialism values found in Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, which she perceives to be a blend of the Western and science fiction; and Brigitte Georgi-Findlay analyzes how the notion of the time-space of the "old West" has been used by TV Westerns over the decades, and how its use changed from the 1940s to the early 21st century. Other three contributions deal with the world of comedy: Linda M. Hess discusses the (un)funniness of Tig Notaro's and Hannah Gadsby's autobiographical, stand-up performances in which Notaro talks about her cancer and Gadsby revisits her trauma after having been brutalized; Michael Louis Moser discusses how the presidency of Donald Trump affected the format of news parody featured in the late-night comedy shows of Stephen Colbert and Seth Meyers; while Marita Sturken identifies a number of disruptions in comedy genre, politics, presidency, media consumption, as well as the intersections between these spheres. In the remaining four chapters in this Section: Carsten Junker takes a critical look at the children's TV show *Liberty's Kids* as a representative of militainment; Katja Kanzler applies the concept of taste in her discussion of the contempt for reality television; John Street demonstrates how vital the understanding of popular culture is to understanding modern-day American politics; and Jennifer Volkmer tracks down manifestations of search for masculinity as seen by the protagonists of a mediocre comedy film *Wild Hogs*.

Section "II. Literature" features ten articles of diverse subject matter. Laura Bieger discusses the role of public intellectuals in contemporary popular culture and how popularity affects said intellectuals; Heike Steinhoff ponders the question of how self-help books and their female authors relate to popular feminism of today; Lisanna Wiele illustrates the queering of the city in the mystery novels by George Lippard and George Thompson; and Harald Zapf notices the attempts to "the author as the principal authority figure in the institution of literature" (401) in his analysis of contemporary, popular lyric poetry. However, the bulk of this Section is devoted to the discussion of (mis)representations of minorities in popular literature. Ruth Gehrman discusses the role of storytelling in Indigenous futurism literature on the example of in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*; Alexandra Hartmann demonstrates how Tayari Jones's *An American Marriage* offers a new look on the stereotype of Strong, Black Womanhood; Zohra Hassan-Pieper takes a critical look at the graphic novel *Habibi* by Craig Thompson and the novel's stereotypical, post-empire imaginary of Muslims; Marius Henderson takes a look at Moor Mother's and Black Quantum Futurism's aesthetic-political practices in the context of Anti-Black gendered violence in popular culture, while Marian Ofori-Amofo deals with (mis)representations of Black identity in his analysis of *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* by Percival Everett. Finally, Clara Petino demonstrates how the image of the witch is represented in modern Salem literature.

Section “III. Other Media and Art Formats” is the most diverse of the three parts when it comes to its subject matter. There are three contributions devoted to music here, however, each one treats on a different aspect of the work of musical artist. Dustin Breitenwischer studies the artistic expressions of a hip-hop artist, Westside Gunn, and his use of #ART; Frank Mehring analyses the ways in which popular music was utilized by presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump; and Gunter Süß advocates the use of music videos—e.g. those by Beyonce and Jay-Z—in the classrooms of American Studies. In the remaining contributions: Juliane Borosch studies the changing metonymy of Michigan Central Station as a landmark of the city of Detroit; Naghmeh Esmaeilpour takes a critical look at the transmedial worlds of two video games and the ways in which Iranians are represented in these worlds; Marlon Lieber demonstrates structural analogy between Andy Warhol’s concept of “master painting” and Karl Marx’s concept of “money form;” and Johannes C. P. Schmid analyzes the internet meme as a phenomenon oscillating between different aspects of popular culture.

Any attempt to deliver a comprehensible, academic insight into the popular culture is a breakneck task. Given the vastness of the landscape hidden behind the term “popular culture,” even if the landscape in question lies “only” within the borders of American culture, any academic work on the subject will have its limitations as to: scope, timeframe, topics, and the subject matter. Thus, the editors of *U.S. American Culture as Popular Culture* had to make choices, which resulted in a material that is eclectic, timely, and insightful.

I think that it is safe to assess that the editors chose papers not in terms of the popularity of American popular culture artifacts which they cover, but rather those which deal with phenomena of substance, quality and cultural and even social significance. The overall theme of the book seems to be, what the mainstream might see as the “other” in popular culture, as majority of the papers treat on the issues related to minorities, be it in terms of gender, race, or art form.

Obviously, as it is the case with such publications, one might point to a number of equally “deserving” issues, which did not find their way to the book. For example, an insight into the phenomena of “cancel culture” in reference to two male representatives of American stand-up comedy scene: Dave Chappelle, due to his alleged transphobia, and Louis C.K.’s due to his sexual misconduct, would be a welcome contribution. Instead, the reader of *U.S. American Culture as Popular Culture* is offered two excellent texts on two female representatives of stand-up: Tig Notaro and Hannah Gatsby and their genre-defying stand-up specials. The juxtaposition of the male and female comedians and their work would certainly enrich the already excellent monograph.

Aside from being a captivating read, *U.S. American Culture as Popular Culture*, given its format of twenty seven articles can prove to be a useful tool in working with students of American Studies. Each of the articles can be used either in class to aid teachers’ presentations or as a source material for students’ BA or MA thesis.

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