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Contents

From the Editors

- I Introduction**
- 3 Global Identities and Literary Encounters CYRUS MULREADY AND
MICHELLE WOODS
- II Keynote Address**
- 7 World Literature and Contemporary Fiction WALTER COHEN
- III Symposium Essays**
- 21 The Amerikan Hero: Vision, Uncertainty, JENNIFER GUTMAN
and Wonder in Kafka's *Amerika*
- 27 Beyond the Haunted House: Urban Space LEE CONELL
as Medium in *Austerlitz*
- 33 Medieval and Modern Race in *Othello* SELENA HUGHES
- 39 "Make This Talk": The Power of Lineage LIZ BONHAG
in *Philadelphia Fire* and *The Tempest*
- 47 Collusion and Human Identity in Roberto SARAH HURD
Bolaño's *By Night in Chile*
- 53 "In the altered light of the Sundarbans": ANDREW BRUSO
Understanding Magical Realism in
Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*
- 59 Flying toward Grace: Ambiguous Utopias JEFFREY CANINO
and the Ambivalence of Escapist Literature
in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*
- IV Poetry**
- Introduction
- 67 *Hommages, Variations, Resonances* H. R. STONEBACK
- Section One
- 69 Manon of the Sun Spot JESSICA MACKENZIE CONTI

70	Despair	DENNIS DOHERTY
71	Intersect	DENNIS DOHERTY
73	A Name for Something That Was Gone	MATTHEW NICKEL
75	Endurance	MATTHEW NICKEL
77	386	SCOTT SCHNEIDER
78	182	SCOTT SCHNEIDER
79	Cædmon in New Paltz	JAMES SHERWOOD
80	Bodaciously Survigrous	H. R. STONEBACK
81	Old Man on Footbridge behind Notre-Dame	H. R. STONEBACK
Section Two		
85	Eyeless on the Walkill	MARC CIOFFI
86	Of the Quiet Couple Dining	MARC CIOFFI
87	Parental Control	ROBERT CUTRERA
88	Two-Step	JOANN K. DEIUDICIBUS
89	Birthmark	JOANN K. DEIUDICIBUS
90	Warning, a Sign of the Times	SARAH HURD
92	Mermanity	DAVID J. HURST
93	Sensus Communis	DAVID J. HURST
94	The Coming of Spring	RYAN JAMES MCGUCKIN
95	The Evening Sleep	RYAN JAMES MCGUCKIN
96	The Cuckoo's Cry	RHONDA SHARY
97	The Surfer Boys of Wellfleet	RHONDA SHARY
98	"What Are You Reading These Days?"	JAMES SHERWOOD
100	Wounded Memoir	ROBERT SINGLETON
102	Another Summer Night Near Baghdad	PATRICK J. SKEA
103	9 Years Old and Very Smart	PATRICK J. SKEA

V Alexie Symposium

- 105 “Breaking and Entering the Works of Sherman Alexie”:
A Literary Symposium
- 107 Alexie’s Young Adult Novel *Tricked* and
Undergraduate White Boy DEAN ENGLE
- 111 “These Be the *War Dances*”: An Argument
for Poetry as Lived-Experience SARAH HURD
- 117 The Limits of Compassion and Art
in the Works of Sherman Alexie RHONDA SHARY
- 123 Who Tells the Story: Sherman Alexie’s
War Dances SARAH WYMAN
- 129 *Face*, Footnotes, and Alexie’s Language
of Subversion MOLLY MCGLENNEN

VI Thesis Abstracts

- 133 Hemingway, Love, and Legacy: Twentieth-
Century Texts That Tackle Impasse in
Romantic Relationships JESSE CERSOSIMO
- 134 Appropriations of the Storm: Re-Visions of
Nature Representations in *King Lear*, *Ran*,
and *A Thousand Acres* LEE CONELL
- 135 Illuminating the Past: The Transmission
of Holocaust Experience to the Third
Generation MICHELLE S. KRAMISEN
- 136 Towards an Environmentalist Academics: Locating
Activist Sensibilities in American
Ecological Literature CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE

VI News and Notes

- 137 News and Notes

VII Guidelines for Submissions
143 Guidelines for Submissions

VIII Contributors
145 Contributors

Kristen P. Rodecker (1983-2011)

The English Department dedicates this issue of the *Shawangunk Review* to Kristen P. Rodecker, whose life was cut short by a sudden illness on November 12, 2011.

Student, classmate, and friend, Kristen is fondly remembered by all who knew her and shared in her great joy for life.

From the Editors

Volume XXIII of the *Shawangunk Review* features the proceedings of the 2011 English Graduate Symposium, “Global Identities and Literary Encounters,” which was co-directed by Cyrus Mulready and Michelle Woods. On behalf of the English Department, we would like to thank Professors Mulready and Woods for arranging an excellent program, in which seven of our MA students presented papers, and the distinguished scholar Walter Cohen of the Comparative Literature Department at Cornell University delivered the keynote address, “World Literature and Contemporary Fiction.” Professor Cohen has generously granted us permission to publish the address, and we are deeply appreciative of his contributions to the symposium and to the present volume of the *Review*.

The Editors are pleased also to include herein the proceedings of “Breaking and Entering the Works of Sherman Alexie,” a literary symposium that was the culminating event of the 2011 One Book One New Paltz / Common Summer Read collaboration. Many thanks to Rhonda Shary for collecting, editing, and introducing the Alexie papers.

The theme of this year’s poetry section is literary *hommage*, and the section includes some thirty poems written by present and former New Paltz graduate students as well as by New Paltz faculty and staff.

The 2013 English Graduate Symposium will be co-directed by Andrew Higgins and Vicki Tromanhauser on the topic of “Biopoetics and Animal Aesthetics.” Please contact Professor Higgins or Professor Tromanhauser for information about the symposium. They will send out a call for papers in the fall.

The submission deadline for Volume XXIV of the *Review* is December 15, 2012. We welcome poetry, book reviews, and critical essays concerning any area of literary studies. Please see submission guidelines on page 143. Students writing a thesis (ENG590) are encouraged to submit an abstract and to apply for the Russell S. Cleverley Memorial Fellowship (for information see page 141).

Thanks as always to Jason Taylor for typesetting and production supervision, and to Jason Cring for the cover art.

I | Introduction

Global Identities and Literary Encounters

Cyrus Mulready and Michelle Woods

Though we are a department of “English,” our expertise encompasses a broad range of languages and linguistic traditions, from canons of British and American literature to writings in translation and by those outside of the English speaking world. On the surface, this looks like the modern outgrowth of our globally integrated age, but the idea of linguistic variety lies at the heart of our tradition: Geoffrey Chaucer noted “for ther is so gret diversite / In Englishsh and in writyng of oure tonge.” Indeed, how to define “English Literature” remains one of the most pressing issues within our department and the profession as a whole. Our department has been in deep deliberations in recent years about how to better integrate world literatures into our curriculum. Growing from these conversations, our collaboration brought together a symposium that explored how authors from various periods, nationalities, and linguistic traditions used writing as a means to define and redefine these complicated identities. The resulting papers reflect the diversity of our theme, with topics ranging from medieval romance and Shakespeare to postmodern fiction.

In looking at texts from various places, times, and cultures, the papers addressed the re-positioning of the global in relation to identity, the making and unmaking of the self, and the role of written and visual narrative in constructing and deconstructing the self. This questioning, in the texts examined here, arises from historical moments of anxiety and social change: whether invoking Renaissance representations of race; early twentieth-century Jewish immigration to America; post-war notions of race, and postmodern anxieties, in America; Jewish identity and the postmemory of the Holocaust; identity and totalitarian rule in Latin America; and Western criticism’s reification of identity through the naming of genres.

The argument of our keynote speaker, Walter Cohen, complemented the engaging variety topics presented in the symposium. In his distinguished career at Cornell University, Professor Cohen has produced a diverse and extensive record of publication, touching on most periods of European literature, criticism, and theory, as well as issues within our profession. His contribution to our symposium, “World Literature and Contemporary Fiction,” is as copious as its title. His argument is that the period since roughly World War II has seen the rise of World Literature in a “strong sense” of the term, a powerful set of intertextually linked traditions that reveals the cross-cultural currents of

globalization. But Cohen warns against utopian views of such a world literary canon, pressing us to think critically about the possibilities, and limitations, of literature as a force for social transformation. His keynote address came from a book-length study with the impressive title *European Literature*. He describes it elegantly as a history of European Literature in relation to the rest of the world, one that considers epic, drama, and the rise of the novel through the historical cross-currents of global cultural exchange.

Jennifer Gutman's "The Amerikan Hero: Vision, Uncertainty, and Wonder in Kafka's *Amerika*" analyzes a different type of heroics in the estranged sight of the immigrant, and the insight it gives to the new world. In Franz Kafka's *Amerika: The Man Who Disappeared* (translated by Michael Hofmann), the teenage Karl Rossman, exiled by his parents for impregnating their servant, arrives in the country of the future, of rampant capitalism and hope. His seemingly directionless journey is held together by what Gutman calls his "heroic vision," one that allows for the "unknowable" and the ineffable, the inherent strangeness of life itself. The novel, often overlooked in Kafka's *oeuvre*, challenges our preconceptions of what a hero—especially in the American tradition—should be and how he should act. Rossman's power, Gutman argues, lies in his very passivity, in his ability to contemplate and accept the world around him (thus, in his own way, changing it).

Lee Conell's "Beyond the Haunted House: Urban Space as Medium in *Austerlitz*" also focuses on a novel about emigration: W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (translated by Anthea Bell). The eponymous Austerlitz, who has survived the Holocaust via the Kindertransport, a last-minute evacuation of Jewish children from Prague in 1938, leads a peripatetic life as an academic, obsessed and haunted by place. Conell focuses on two of these places: the Vyrnwy Dam and the sunken village of Llanwyddn that he passes with his adopted father, and Terezin—the concentration camp in which Austerlitz discovers his mother had been interred. Sebald is famous for inserting found images in his text, adding to the ghostliness of memory and place; Conell argues that these images and the mode of narrative highlight the constructedness not only of narrative but of memory and, thus, identity.

Organized around texts that examine changing attitudes about race and gender through time, the second panel opened with Selena Hughes's "Medieval and Modern Race in *Othello*." As Hughes argues, *Othello* presents its audience with perceptions of racial identity that are as unstable as its famous titular character. Indeed, Hughes's reading culminates in an insightful interpretation of the play's final scene, Othello's suicide speech. She sees in Shakespeare's language a fracturing of "the Moor's" identity that reflects changing social mores within the early modern world.

In "Make This Talk': The Power of Lineage in *Philadelphia Fire* and

The Tempest,” Liz Bonhag critiques the gender politics that she sees at the core of John Edgar Wideman’s *Philadelphia Fire*. Moving beyond simplistic denunciation, Bonhag finds in this reading an understanding of Wideman’s literary appropriations, particularly of Shakespeare, shedding light on one of the novel’s key intertexts. Wideman, in Bonhag’s argument, uses his literary inheritance to challenge racist divisions of black and white, but also reinforces the patriarchal authority that pervades the novel.

The third panel began with Sarah Hurd’s “Collusion and Human Identity in Roberto Bolaño’s *By Night in Chile*.” Bolaño’s novella (translated by Chris Andrews) is an empathetic portrait of a priest, corrupted and co-opted by the Pinochet regime, who draws us into his deathbed confession. Hurd argues that Bolaño’s portrayal of Father Lacroix shows the process of collusion, arising out of the human weaknesses and fallibilities we all share, small compromises that can lead to murder and totalitarian thought. The novella is made up of two sentences, the last sentence and the rest of the book; the flight of narrative and its recursiveness draws the reader into an empathic relationship with the corrupted Lacroix, leading us to question our own acts of collusion.

“In the altered light of the Sundarbans’: Understanding Magical Realism in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*,” Andrew Brusio’s contribution to the volume, sees the globalized literary culture through the lens of genre. Specifically, Brusio observes that “Magical Realism,” a term that originated in German aesthetic theory, has become a talismanic label for literatures of non-Western writers. Brusio recovers the original meaning of the term and points to the insistence on artistic process that originally characterized magical realism. In applying this revised understanding of the category to Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, his essay illustrates that reductive terminology can be redeemed for the purpose of critical clarity.

Our final essay, Jeffrey Canino’s “Flying Toward Grace: Ambiguous Utopias and the Ambivalence of Escapist Literature in Thomas Pynchon’s *Against the Day*,” looks to historical fiction for a nostalgic view of a world without borders. This utopia, staged by the “Chums of Chance” in the canopy of an early twentieth-century airship, recalls stories taken from the purposely naïve fiction of boys’ adventure stories. Canino shows how this worldview resonates with the novel’s depiction of the Chicago World’s Fair and its utopian world village (not unlike Walt Disney’s EPCOT). Canino’s astute reading of Pynchon’s ironic twists and turns on this theme reveals both nostalgia and ambivalence for the idealized world of the “Chums.” The paper thus resonates with Professor Cohen’s final reflections on postmodernism and the hope of an effective global economy.

Max Brod, editing Kafka’s *Amerika*—a novel published posthumous-

ly—wanted to remove what he regarded as mistakes, including Karl’s vision, looking down what might be the Hudson Valley, of a bridge connecting New York with Boston. The re-envisioning of worlds and identities in literature through displacement or hyperbole, irony or melancholy is a suggestive locus for the re-envisioning of the global. The preponderance of the transnational and transhistoric in literature, its inherent dialogue with others in the past and the future, as much as with the present, might allow us to see bridges where they do not yet exist.

II | Keynote Address

World Literature and Contemporary Fiction

Walter Cohen

How might we understand the emergence of the category of world literature, especially in relation to contemporary fiction—roughly, since World War Two? In an obvious sense, world literature has existed since the advent of writing 5000 years ago, though it was initially confined to the Middle East, only later spreading or arising across Eurasia, parts of Africa, and Meso-America, and still later—often quite recently—extending all over the planet. This is world literature in the minimal sense.

But almost from the start, world literature possessed its maximal sense of shared forms and themes, though of course “world” here means an ever-expanding portion of the Old World. Literature, and certainly European literature from the Greeks on, never developed in isolation. The present accordingly stands out on quantitative more than qualitative grounds—the nearly universal incorporation into a global literary system, the ever increasing cross-cultural and cross-linguistic indebtedness of writers to one another. A similar qualification applies to fiction: it survives from 2000 BCE—the common literary roots for much of today’s global fiction may be located in South Asia more than 2000 years ago—but recent decades are distinguished by pervasive interaction.

Specific steps toward this pervasive interaction include, among many others, the collapse of the literary monopolies of “universal,” learned languages (e.g., Latin and Sanskrit) and the rise of various vernaculars, registered by Dante and, much later, by Goethe in his introduction of the category of world literature; the breakdown of local, regional, and national boundaries, explicitly invoked by Marx and Engels in developing Goethe’s idea, prematurely but accurately; European colonial expansion beginning in the fifteenth century and culminating in late-nineteenth-century global dominance; post-World War Two decolonization; and the post-1989 collapse of Communism. Fiction provides a useful focus because it is the literary form most tied to the modern world and to Western global influence.

Contemporary fiction is composed in the wake of, above all, European realism and modernism. In a purely chronological sense, recent fiction is postmodernist: it comes after modernism. But of course writers can and do continue to write in realist or modernist veins. In realist fiction, a detailed depiction of a social world that is familiar to the reader—or that the writer seeks

to make familiar to the reader—is yoked to a shaped plot. The story line, and in particular the dynamically changing hopes and fears it raises in the reader about the main character(s), transparently conveys the primary import of the narrative, whatever the ultimate resolution. Such a procedure is possible because author and audience share a sense of the world and, potentially, a set of values, characteristically rooted in a national, usually nationalist, sometimes imperialist, sensibility. This consensus imbues fictional events with a meaningful logic, even if the writer has to bludgeon the audience into internalizing that logic. Think Richardson and Fielding, Austen, Dickens, and Eliot; Balzac and Stendhal; Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

Given the geographical range and historical durability of the realist novel, it is perilous to propose that it possesses any stable, underlying social logic. Yet it is often connected with the coming to literary self-consciousness of a culture previously unrepresented in fictional form. Accordingly, one often sees a productive tension between traditional culture, including traditional literary culture and oral narrative, and modernity, the latter understood not only as the contemporary, urban world but also, implicitly, as the realist novel itself. Since 1940, realism has proven a recurrent resource for American novelists from immigrant or minority communities (Sandra Cisneros, Khaled Hosseini, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bernard Malamud). In Europe, the pattern is similar. We find realist fiction on the continent's eastern periphery (Tadeusz Borowski, Polish), in travel literature about the Third World (Graham Greene), and in French immigrant literature (Némirovsky). The modern Western and non-Western variants of the realist tradition also bear a certain family resemblance. In Mariama Bâ (French), Eileen Chang (Chinese), Anita Desai, Nawal El-Saadawi (Arabic), Naguib Mahfouz (Arabic), Saadat Hasan Manto (Urdu), V. S. Naipaul, Kenzaburo Oe (Japanese), Alan Paton, Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Indonesian), Wang Anyi (Chinese), Albert Wendt, and many others, you experience either the entirely salutary shock of the familiar (of seeing your culture in literature perhaps for the first time, if you are from that culture) or the equally bracing shock of the new (of seeing a previously alien culture from the inside for the first time, if you are not). And this, of course, is what earlier European realists—to use the terms somewhat loosely here—also sought and their readers also found.

As the previous chapter argued, no comparable implicit bond between author and audience characterizes modernism. One can distinguish at least two prominent responses to the breakdown of community—radical attenuation of the plot (Proust, Joyce, or Woolf) or the proliferation of striking events with a comparable proliferation of possible interpretations and hence the absence of a meaningful pattern (Kafka). Either way, modernist fiction seeks to beat realism at its own game of artistically apotheosizing the everyday—by

revealing, for instance, that existence in the increasingly complex urban social world lacks a significant trajectory, is foundationally subjective and hence precludes reliable knowledge of others, or is uncontrollably rich in semantic options. Paradoxically, such intensified self-scrutiny provides the basis for repairing the loss of community, an enterprise rooted in a responsibility to the routine, uninvented reality of life. This project of modernist fiction is forged in an era of incomplete modernization, at a time when the competition of the hereditary nobility and the ever-rising middle class—arguably the central story, the great engine, of at least European history since the aftermath of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century—runs out of gas, disabling the bourgeois ideology of progress that had underpinned narrative dynamism over the previous two hundred years. Modernist fiction thus sees the inadequacy of both aristocratic and bourgeois society; it sees beyond them but at a time when, we can now recognize, there really is no beyond. It combines a deepened commitment to ordinary life with a refusal to indicate an extra-aesthetic means of realizing that commitment.

After 1945, the modernist tradition is often extended by writers who in varying degrees had already established themselves but who in most cases continued to publish thereafter. Think Faulkner, Hedayat, and Hemingway, Kawabata, Malcolm Lowry, Mann, and Platonov. Their successors include García Márquez, Mishima, and Solzhenitsyn, but also Lispector, McCullers, Morrison, Sarraute, Welty, and Christa Wolf. It is possible that the modernist valorization of interiority divorced from worldly striving proves especially congenial to the growing number of distinguished women writers.

Specifically postmodernist work reveals a structural awareness of both the realist and the modernist traditions. Such fiction returns to the robust story line, the plottedness, of realism that high modernism had eschewed. But it also absorbs the modernist critique of omniscient or impersonal narrative as well as of the inherent meaningfulness of the sequence of events narrated. This superimposition of successive literary periods is not a random consequence of the mere availability of both options in the prior fictional heritage. On the contrary, only by insisting on the fictiveness, the constructed character of the coherent plotted narrative can the postwar novel both tell a story whose meaning is carried by such a narrative and, simultaneously, call into question the very possibility that one can derive a definitively knowable meaning from such a procedure (or any other). This, the distinctive stance of the period, emerges in the first era after the final death throes of pre-capitalist elites in two world wars. And with the collapse of Communism, we enter the first true era of world capitalism. The resulting somewhat sunnier fictional world is, then, the achievement of the (belated) American century—from which one should not infer that postmodernist fiction is distinctively or predominantly

American.

That fiction, often having recourse to a metafictional, self-conscious, self-referential structure and a verbally exuberant playfulness, deploys a recurrent set of techniques, to some extent associated with specific kinds of subject matter. First, realism and modernism may be merely juxtaposed. Second, one finds a focus on a collective protagonist or a return to history. Third, the invocation of the supernatural or the dislocation of linear temporality may disrupt realist plotting. Fourth, the truth claim of the text can come under pressure from multiple tellers of the tale, the presentation of different points of view (first, second, and third person), the internal narration of another person's story, or the rejection of narrative authority—the acknowledgement that events, their interpretation, or both, have been made up. Finally, the presentation of the fiction as a nonfictional scholarly text that nonetheless tells a story fuses form and content in a way that highlights the constructedness of the literary work. Most modernist novels deploy a number of these methods. In what follows, however, I treat these methods separately for analytical purposes.

Many fictional works since World War Two reveal an unsynthetic mix of realism and modernism, and are in this sense transitional. What is distinctive about Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is its systematic separation of the two within a single framework. The precolonial Ibo world of the first two-thirds of the novel is modernist in the sense that members of the community just live. Okonkwo may kill a man, and that will have serious consequences (banishment), but life goes on, and in time he is allowed to return home. What generates from his defects a definitive, fatal trajectory, what turns him into a tragic figure, is the advent of the British in the last part of the novel. In other words, *Things Fall Apart* reverses literary history by dramatizing the fall from modernism into realism.

African fiction also exemplifies one of the breaks with most earlier realist novels by the turn to the collective protagonist by, for instance, Ousmane Sembène or Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo. Such works do not take on board the modernist critique of realism, however. It is another matter with Eudora Welty, Tim O'Brien, Michael Ondaatje, and many others. For instance, García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the story of a family, a town, a country, and a continent from roughly 1850 to 1950, but with allusions that recall the original European conquest and colonization and even Edenic prehistory. The novel apparently announces its protagonist in its first sentence: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember the distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." We do indeed follow the colonel's fortunes for more than one-third of the book; thereafter, his politically progressive struggles as well as his looks and personality are reproduced in other members of his family, but he himself is unceremoni-

ously dropped. The quoted sentence suggests if not why, then at least how this happens. Each chapter begins *in medias res*, then retreats in time to explain how we got to this point, and finally moves forward toward resolution of the immediate problem—in this case, the rescue of Aureliano Buendía. The novel as a whole, though more covertly, conforms to the same structure. Loosely speaking, we experience the novel as the events unfold. But at the very end we learn that the entire story had already been written—by Melquíades the gypsy, in Sanskrit. Thus, the novel offers two perspectives: biographically speaking, both the open-ended narrative of possibility as experienced by the author as child, and the dismal, retrospectively fated catastrophe recognized by the novelist as adult. This latter outcome, however, cuts against García-Márquez's left-wing politics.

One Hundred Years of Solitude may be seen as a novel of the recent past. In different ways, this is also true of fiction by Doctorow, Grass, Petterson, Rushdie, Ruiz Zafón, and, of course, an untold number of others. More fully historical novelists, albeit in a realist vein, include Ivo Andrić, Carpentier, and Bashevis Singer. What you do not find much of, either in the early twentieth century or more recently, are modernist works of historical fiction. The definition of modernism developed earlier suggests why: if the sequence of events lacks a causally meaningful trajectory, the historical novel of Scott or Tolstoy seems hopelessly outdated, even wrongheaded. The resurgence of historical fiction in recent decades accordingly indicates postmodernism's striking break with its predecessors. Since this phenomenon is not routinely recognized, it may be pardonable to bore you with a long list: Barth, Byatt, Calvino, Doctorow, Eco, Jonathan Safran Foer, Fowles, Kadare, Kiš, Lampedusa, Munro, Morrison, Pamuk, Pavić, Rushdie, and Amy Tan. Recurrent devices include history without historical figures, the oscillation between past and present, emphasis on how the text came to be written and hence on its contingent status, plotting that both extends and withholds meaning from historical movement, an elusively allegorical relationship to the present in the fiction from Communist countries, and, in more recent work, a structurally analogous but ideologically very different effort to return to a time prior to the current conflict in the hope of finding resources for reconciliation.

Still another way of sending an ostensibly straightforward narrative off the realist tracks is the turn to the supernatural or impossible. There are, of course, predecessors for this strategy from both the nineteenth century (Mary Shelley, Balzac, James, Stoker, Wilde), and the twentieth (above all, Kafka). Once again, however, there seems to be a noticeable increase in frequency since World War Two—for instance, Anaya, García-Márquez, Grass, Morrison, Mulisch, Murakami Haruki, Nabokov, Narayan, Naylor, Rulfo, Rushdie, Tan, Updike, and Vonnegut. Although these works do not form a coherent

group, most show little interest in the often psychological or metaphysical concerns of ostensibly similar earlier fiction. Rather, in line with the turn to the historical novel, they often attempt to come to terms with traumatic events from the national and international past—civil, class, and imperial conflict, slavery, World War Two and its attendant atrocities, decolonization. This particular antirealistic treatment is designed not only to render the meaning of the plot provisional; it also suggests the haunting of the present by a past that cannot yet be directly addressed.

The dislocation of linear chronology points elsewhere, away from even a tentative, problematic account of causally shaped events to a valorization of private experience salvaged with difficulty from the wreckage of one's own life or of history more broadly. Some such strategy is at work in Danticat, Kiran Desai, Delillo, Ellison, Edmundo Paz-Soldán's *Turing's Delirium*, and Oscar Hijuelos. Kundera's *Unbearable Lightness of Being* can illustrate the possibilities. Turning politically on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, it moves backwards and forwards in time, following its three main characters to their deaths, one in what the novel presents as a meaningless march of progressive intellectuals in Indochina, the other two—involving the central couple—when their truck goes off the road. These latter deaths are reported long before the end, so that the novel can end the night before, which they spend together in a hotel. Kundera thus produces an unsentimental narrative in which his two favored characters die pointlessly but in which private happiness is affirmed for its ability to triumph, albeit precariously, over the absurdities of political belief, Communist or otherwise.

An alternative to manipulation of narrative time is manipulation of the narrator. This is not just, or even necessarily, a matter of narrative subjectivity—a staple of the novel by the modernist period at the latest. In principle, multiple narrators, and even shifts among first, second, and third-person narration, could produce a collective convergence on a rough approximation of the truth, perhaps the logic of novels by Erdrich, Mo Yan, Morrison, or Restrepo. But often the effect is the dissolution of coherent personality and perspective—and therefore of any pretense of objective knowledge—as in Beckett or Gao Xingjian.

In an important variant of complexity in perspective, the internal narrator recounts another's story—hence, at times producing uncertainty about who the protagonist really is. This method goes back at least to Romantic fiction of the nineteenth century by such writers as Chateaubriand and Melville. But its “natural” home is probably modernism, in Conrad's use of Marlowe, but then subsequently in Fitzgerald, and after World War Two in Mann, Greene, Potok, and Salih. The postmodernist twist occurs when the narrator doesn't tell the story so much as write it. In Allende, Bellow, Junot Díaz, Roth,

and Schlink this writing is overtly linked to creative invention and hence uncertain access to truth, even when, as is often the case, much of the narrative conforms to relatively traditional realist norms.

Orhan Pamuk repeatedly has recourse to this technique. In *My Name Is Red*, set in the late sixteenth century, we learn at the very end from the female protagonist that her son, whom we've seen as a whiny little boy, has written the story we're reading and that we should not "be taken in by Orhan. . . . For the sake of a delightful and convincing story, there isn't a lie Orhan wouldn't deign to tell." In *The Museum of Innocence*, the first-person narrator/protagonist moves in the social circle of one Orhan Pamuk and belatedly asks Orhan to write his biography. Orhan agrees, but only near the very end does he explain that he's done so by composing a first-person narrative of that biography—in other words, what we had thought till then was actually an autobiography. Perhaps the most striking variant occurs in *Snow*, which seems to be about an ex-lefty poet named Ka who returns to his home in Kars in eastern Turkey, where he becomes involved with Muslim fundamentalists, in an unexpectedly culpable way that later leads to his murder. But the novel increasingly concerns the efforts of a novelist named Orhan to reconstruct the story, a reconstruction that leads to his growing emulation of/competition with Ka and hence to doubts about the obstacle of psychic projection in knowing the other. Moreover, on the last page, one of the Muslim characters tells Orhan: "I'd like to tell your readers not to believe anything you say about me, anything you say about any of us." Thus, the modernist sense of the unknowability of the other is tied in original fashion to the sense of political otherness. In similar fashion, Eco ends *Baudolino* with a good-natured acceptance of the inevitability of the narrative fabrication that characterizes his titular protagonist. And at the end of Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, the cousin of the first-person narrator, whom the narrator has treated unceremoniously, replies to the tale: "you've got it all wrong. . . . Nothing is impossible, I suppose, with that crazy imagination of yours. I'm not surprised by anything you do or say, but if I were you, *prima*, I'd leave well enough alone."

But postmodern fiction generates a meaningful plot while emphasizing the provisional status of that meaning most systematically via the appropriation of what are conventionally extra-novelistic, often learned discourses. Like much else, this technique goes back at least to Joyce's *Ulysses*. Borges is similarly versatile, offering literary criticism of an imaginary writer, rewriting Cervantes without changing a word, and providing a bibliographical guide. Pynchon composes a brief knock-off of a Jacobean revenge tragedy. Cabrera-Infante reports the death of Trotsky in the styles of various prominent Latin American writers. Nabokov devotes a chapter to a philosophical account of time. Fowles interlaces his Victorian romantic plot with brief scholarly, de-

mystifying essays on the society of the time. Coetzee includes in a novel an extended discussion of animal rights—a discussion that was published separately as part of an intellectual debate. And Marisha Pessl appropriately concludes a novel primarily devoted to the first-person narrator’s senior year in high school with a multiple-choice final exam.

We approach more closely a particular formal incorporation of scholarship in Manuel Puig’s fictional case for a depathologized view of homosexuality in a series of learned footnotes to the text. Similarly, Kiš invents a series of biographies of Communists (usually) murdered during the Stalinist period (plus an account of a fourteenth-century Jew probably killed by the Inquisition), in which historical figures, with footnoted citations, and fictional creations, also footnoted, are intermingled. Recent works have gone much further, presenting the entire fiction in the form of a scholarly apparatus. The titles often tell it all: Kiš’s subsequent collection *The Encyclopedia of the Dead*; Milorad Pavič’s *Dictionary of the Khazars*; Han Shaogong’s *Dictionary of Maqiao*; Roberto Bolaño’s mock-literary biography, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*.

Probably the founding modern work in this tradition is not overtly marked as such. Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962) consists of a critical Foreword by Charles Kinbote to the nearly-finished 999-line poem by his next-door neighbor, the recently murdered poet John Shade; Shade’s poem, itself entitled “Pale Fire”; Kinbote’s Commentary to the poem, which is far longer than the poem it nominally seeks to elucidate; and an Index to the Foreword and Commentary. Kinbote has the privilege of publishing the just-completed poem, together with his own annotations, because he attempted—unsuccessfully—to shield Shade from the bullet of an assassin and thereby earned the gratitude of Shade’s previously hostile widow. “Pale Fire” is an older man’s Frostian meditation in rhyming iambic pentameter couplets, divided into four cantos, on life and afterlife—on the progress of his life; on his love for his wife and the unhappiness of their homely daughter Hazel, who ultimately commits suicide; on his own heart attack and near-death experience; and on the aesthetic and metaphysical speculations these events inspire.

The three parts of Kinbote’s scholarly apparatus have another orientation entirely. They report much about Kinbote himself, who, like Shade, is on the literature faculty of an Appalachian college clearly indebted to Nabokov’s own experiences at Cornell University in central New York during the 1950s. More important, Kinbote’s apparatus discovers in Shade’s poem covert references to King Charles of Zembla, a country perhaps located in Scandinavia and ruled over by a benignly social democratic homosexual monarch until an Extremist (Communist) coup forces the king to escape into exile. This is the topic that Kinbote has unsuccessfully urged Shade to write about. In his Com-

mentary, he scarcely disguises the fact that he is the fugitive King Charles. He explains that Shade's killer is really Jakob Gradus, an assassin hired by the Extremists to gun down King Charles. He therefore rejects the media account: that the killer is Jack Grey, an escapee from the Institute for the Criminally Insane who mistakes Shade for Judge Goldsworth, owner of the house next door to Shade's that Kinbote is renting and the man responsible for putting Grey behind bars. In other words Kinbote is mad, as the reader almost immediately suspects. Thus, Kinbote makes it easy for the reader to see that he is really King Charles, while the novel makes it easy to see that he is not. He is probably V. Botkin, a forlorn émigré professor of Russian at the college, who, perhaps lamenting the loss of his country, imagines himself the exiled King Charles of Zembla.

Pale Fire is a phenomenon of form. If you imagine the novel spatially, the Commentary is the poem and, hence, reality, seen through a distorting mirror. Zembla is the mirror image of Appalachia; characters and events in one world have their anagrammatic, palindromic, acronymic, or translated equivalents in the other. As with words, so with numbers, whether one looks at the length of the poem or at crucial dates. There has long since been an ample body of scholarship elucidating these patterns, which provide much of the fun of the novel. To what extent, however, are the patterns of *Pale Fire* more than amusing games, more than the idiosyncracies of the author? For Nabokov, playfulness is highly purposeful. But though the elaborate patterns of *Pale Fire* provide a powerful rationale for finding a deep meaning in life, each of Shade's assertions of such meaning is immediately ironized. On the other hand, that meaning is there, though unintelligibly so. Hazel Shade's apparently meaningless poltergeist transcriptions, from which Kinbote is unable to derive any "warning . . . of her soon-coming death," actually is a hidden message to Shade from his dead Aunt Maud about the mortal danger *he* in the event fails to avoid after completing "Pale Fire." This search for significance informs Kinbote's Commentary as well. Shade writes: "Man's life as commentary to abstruse/ Unfinished poem. Note for further use." Kinbote glosses: "our poet suggests here that human life is but a series of footnotes to a vast obscure unfinished masterpiece." With similar unconsciousness, Kinbote earlier insists, "I have no desire to twist and batter an unambiguous *apparatus criticus* into the monstrous semblance of a novel." Nonetheless, Kinbote's entire invented story, its mirror structures, its verbal and numerical coincidences should be seen as a desperate search for a logic to life that in extreme form parallels Shade's own meditative quest.

Two allusive patterns deepen these preoccupations. Though Shade indicates that the title of his poem comes from Shakespeare, he does not explain that it comes from *Timon of Athens*, where the moon's pale fire is a dim re-

flection of the sun's more powerful flame. Kinbote never figures the allusion out, despite the various clues. Thus, when he attempts to create meaningful patterns in his life, he is wrong. But when he denies the possibility of such patterns, he is wrong again. It is as if this deeper significance existed, but only beyond human understanding. So, too, with "pale fire." As Shade's title, it may refer to the reflected light that is all Shade imagines he can see of the hereafter. As Nabokov's, it captures the relationship between Shade and Kinbote, the editor basking in the reflected glory of the great writer. Kinbote makes this very point: "I have reread, not without pleasure, my comments to his lines, and in many cases have caught myself borrowing a kind of *opalescent* light from my poet's *fiery orb*."

The relationship between Shade and Kinbote also informs the second set of allusions—to eighteenth-century English literature. Kinbote recognizes that "Pale Fire" is composed "in a neo-Popian prosodic style," indeed giving himself credit for having "Suggested to him [Shade] the heroic measure." Like "Pale Fire," Pope's *Essay on Man* and *Dunciad* are in four parts of heroic, or rhyming iambic pentameter, couplets. *The Essay on Man* is a philosophical meditation and hence a thematic model for Shade's poem. *The Dunciad* is a mock-epic satire in which Pope settles scores, some related to the editing of Shakespeare. In its *Variorum* edition, planned even before the first edition, Pope included an apparatus that anticipates Kinbote's—prologue, annotations, and index—where he attacked his (many) critics, often presenting his comments through a fictitious character, Martin Scriblerus. *The Dunciad* thus offered Nabokov a model exploitation of scholarly format for literary effect. Pope also offered Nabokov Zembla, in both *The Essay on Man* and *The Dunciad*, which may get the reference from *The Battle of the Books* by Pope's friend and collaborator, Jonathan Swift, and which may pass it on to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

But Nabokov's sympathy for idiosyncratic outcasts, for psychic suffering, separates him from the satirical temper of the Age of Reason. This concern lies behind the parallel between the Shade-Kinbote relationship and that between Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, author of *The Life of Johnson*—between, that is, two writers and their two admiring commentators. The comparison ranges across physical similarities, stylistic tics, social behavior, geographical origin, metaphysical debate, and unauthorized sexual activity. *Pale Fire's* epigraph from *The Life of Johnson* is the closest thing the novel has to a moral. Kinbote asks: "so the password is—?" And Shade replies: "Pity." Kinbote's account of Zembla refers to Yeslove, a locale that is the penultimate entry in the Index and hence the novel. Commenting on it, Nabokov observed: "My novel is a rather clever, complex thing, but its message is rather simple."

This may seem a surprising statement about a novel whose form osten-

tatiously seems to foreclose the kinds of emotional identification routinely accessible in the realist novel. But *Pale Fire* is an intensely personal work. Nabokov had deepened his familiarity with eighteenth-century English literature, and especially its poetry, as part of his translation of and commentary on Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, essentially completed before he began *Pale Fire*. Thus, his model for the form of that novel was not only Pope's scholarly apparatus for *The Dunciad* but also his own for *Eugene Onegin*. Two decades earlier, he had written the first two chapters of a never-completed Russian novel with obvious geographical, thematic, characterological, verbal, and sexual affinities to *Pale Fire*. Yet these chapters possess none of the formal audacity of the later work. Perhaps Nabokov was encouraged in this new direction by the lectures he prepared on *Ulysses* for his courses on the European novel in the U. S. and by a more distanced relationship to English than he could have had to his native Russian. Still, though by 1955 he was thinking about what would become *Pale Fire* and by 1957 all the materials he would eventually use, including the crucial idea of building a novel out of a poem and commentary, were potentially there, it took him some years to see the possibilities.

What, then, explains Nabokov's renewed interest in and eventual completion of *Pale Fire*, as well as the changes from his prevision of the work? Nabokov began *Pale Fire* in late 1960 on the Riviera, spent a little less than a year completing the novel, and sent it off from Switzerland before the end of 1961. Most of *Pale Fire*—and especially Kinbote's isolation, ostracism, and suffering—seems emotionally distant from its rich and now world-famous author, happily married for decades and happily retired from his teaching career at Cornell. But of course it is not. The return to Europe allowed Nabokov a more powerful re-connection with the most painful parts of his family history, as they were intertwined with the most painful parts of twentieth-century European history.

The killing of John Shade is modeled on the murder of Nabokov's father: "my father shielded the lecturer (his old friend Milyukov) from the bullets of two Russian Fascists and, while vigorously knocking down one of the assassins, was fatally shot by the other." In *Pale Fire*, this tragic, heroic moment is given a farcical twist. Nabokov's father resembles Shade in receiving the fatal bullet and Kinbote in attempting to save his friend. An analogous complexity can be found in the author's own self-projection into his fiction. Whereas in previsions of the novel Nabokov the person appears to be associated primarily with the king, he is to be found in *Pale Fire* most fully in John Shade. In Nabokov's autobiography his father, facing possible death in a duel, calmly reassures his terrified son. But in *Pale Fire* the younger man seeks—unsuccessfully—to protect the older. This deeply felt, but in-the-event frustrated,

effort to save the older man one reveres thus links Nabokov not only to Kinbote but also to his father, whose selfless act he imaginatively recreates and inhabits. *Pale Fire* is unique in drawing so directly on the actual circumstances of his murder. Nabokov wrote two versions of his autobiography, one before *Pale Fire*, one after. The latter has a less guarded relationship to emotionally raw material. Perhaps by rendering this material fictively in *Pale Fire*, Nabokov is then able to narrate it factually in *Speak, Memory*. If so, the return to Europe seems to have inspired a deeper engagement with his past—first novelistically, then autobiographically.

The same goes for Nabokov's expanded discussion in the revised autobiography of his brother Sergey, less than a year his junior. Around 1915, when they were both in their mid-teens, Nabokov discovered—to his dismay—his brother's homosexuality. This moment lies behind a similar episode in his unfinished Russian novel. The brothers spent some uncomfortable time together in the Western European emigration during the 1930s, but the relationship clearly improved. Yet Sergey did not survive World War Two. Nabokov's sad but unappealing response is recorded in his letters of the time. The version in the revised autobiography is more admiring and self-reflective: "A frank and fearless man, he criticized the regime in front of colleagues, who denounced him. He was arrested, accused of being a 'British spy' and sent to a Hamburg concentration camp where he died of inanition, on January 10, 1945. It is one of those lives that hopelessly claim a belated something—compassion, understanding, no matter what—which the mere recognition of such a want can neither replace nor redeem." Yet even this much, or this little, proved possible for Nabokov only after his return to Europe. In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov abandons the external view of homosexuality of the unfinished novel, instead trying to imagine homosexuality from the inside by having Kinbote tell his own story and giving his fictional character some of his brother's attributes. And since Kinbote tries to shield Shade from the fatal bullet and then produces a scholarly commentary as an émigré, Nabokov connects his ignored, unloved, and disquieting brother to his beloved father and to himself.

Here, too, he seems to have been able to do this in fiction earlier than in fact. The novelist's treatment may have been both the precondition of the memoirist's revision and his closest approximation to the "compassion" and "understanding" he longed to provide but could not. The emotional force of *Pale Fire* arises from the author's projection of himself and his family into the central characters and their relationships. What is distinctive about it is its addition of the family into which Nabokov was born to the family he went on to make. It is a novel of both pre-war Europe and post-war America unique in his career.

For this reason, there is a close tie between *Pale Fire*'s familial and politi-

cal resonance. Nabokov's father was murdered by a reactionary monarchist attack on the liberal wing of the Russian emigration; he was also an indirect casualty of the Bolshevik Revolution. Sergey was unambiguously a victim of Nazism. For Nabokov these were the two terrors he left behind in coming to America. In *Pale Fire*, he re-engages with those terrors. Like some of Nabokov's earlier fiction, the novel is informed by the unitotalitarian outlook most memorably theorized by Hannah Arendt. Yet the Extremist revolution in Zembla, aided by Russia, might seem anachronistic. The Soviet domination of Eastern Europe dates from the 1940s. A more proximate provocation to Nabokov, and an American one at that, was the Cuban Revolution of 1959. In 1963 he objected to a special issue of a French journal devoted to him because that same periodical had earlier published a special issue on Cuba that, for Nabokov, revealed "a certain sympathy for Castro. . . . I am against any dictatorship, right or left, terrestrial or celestial, white, grey or black, pink, red or purple, Ivan the Terrible or Hitler, Lenin, Stalin or Khrushcheyev, Trujillo or Castro." In this respect, the politics of *Pale Fire* combine past and present.

Thus, out of an aridly scholarly apparatus and a relentlessly playful style, Nabokov constructs a work of emotional intensity and political engagement. But *Pale Fire* develops a distinctive version of the eventually standard postmodernist strategy of telling a meaningful story while also calling that meaning into question. Because it is composed of text and commentary, it offers two different stories or, more accurately, two different areas of interest. Though John Shade is involved with fatal events (his daughter's death in the poem, his own in the novel), he has no story. The poem does not culminate in Hazel's suicide, which occurs halfway through. Instead, it meditates on love and (im)mortality. Similarly, the novel does not culminate in Shade's murder. It in no way changes the reader's assessment of his life—for instance, by revealing its meaninglessness. It is otherwise with Kinbote. His life is presented—by him—as a detective story, whose truth only gradually emerges. The reader is encouraged to want to know what will happen next and, once the identification of Kinbote with King Charles has been made, to learn how the King lived, escaped, will respond to the threat of assassination, and so on. In Kinbote's narrative Shade's death *is* intensely meaningful because it enables him to gain control of "Pale Fire" and hence tell his own, romantic tale. But here, too, we learn, there really is no story, no shape to the character's life, just an émigré's sad existence, a pale refraction of the fire of John Shade's significant life. The elusively meaningful plotted narrative definitive of postmodernist fiction exists only in a deluded character's imagination. Thus, the novel may be seen as late modernist or transitionally postmodernist. Yet the relegation of narrative to fantasy is not equivalent to its rejection. One of the lasting effects of *Pale Fire* is of the imaginative power of Kinbote's creativity.

What, finally, should we make of this fictional tradition? Realist, modernist, and now postmodernist fiction encode in their forms thoughtful propositions about life. The implicit postmodernist claim that human action is potentially meaningful but never subject to certainty, only subject to validation in relation to others, is not obviously inferior to any normative epistemological, ethical, or political position. Why not therefore see globalization as the condition of possibility for the composition of far more first-rate fiction in far more languages than has ever been the case before? Why not take seriously what these writers of the “American century,” of international postmodernism, actually have to say? A central lesson of the twentieth century is that there are no shortcuts to significant change: you simply cannot leap over scarcity into a just society. In the era of globalization, the advent of world literature in the strong sense might contribute to cross-cultural understanding. There are no guarantees—or even optimism—associated with this perspective, only the conviction that the alternative is to re-erect a Maginot line, a line, moreover, that has already been irretrievably breached.

III Symposium Essays

The Amerikan Hero: Vision, Uncertainty, and Wonder in Kafka's *Amerika*

Jennifer Gutman

In the opening paragraph of Franz Kafka's *Amerika*, the novel's émigré pioneer is introduced as the passive object of others' designs and actions: "seventeen-year-old Karl Rossmann, who had been sent to America by his unfortunate parents because a maid had seduced him and had a child by him" (3). The back-story to his voyage to America is explained as if his past is being carried behind him with the wind. The only suggestion of agency on the part of the young man arises from a phrase that will be associated with him throughout the novel: "he suddenly saw" (3). As the structure of the opening paragraph implies, Karl is a person to whom things happen, not one who makes them happen. Yet, if the very concept of "hero" must imply some sense of action, this first paragraph also seems to suggest that Karl is actually active in his ability to see. Sight, in this respect, is not restricted to the sense-ability to perceive with the eye. Rather, it suggests an insight, a sensibility, an active contemplation of what is seen.

The Statue of Liberty that Karl "suddenly saw" had "already been in view for some time" (3). Karl's contemplation of this sight, though, is what suddenly strikes him, as he begins to see the greater significance of the symbolic structure that welcomes him to this new, strange land: "The sword in her hand seemed only just to have been raised aloft, and the unchained winds blew about her form" (3). Such description does not result from a mere physical understanding of what is seen; Karl inquisitively ponders the implications of this sight: the apparent newness of the raised arm, as if fueled by some menacing spirit to greet him, the barbaric winds, perhaps of chance, of change, of freedom, circulating a form—one whose static immobility has already been called into question. I argue, then, that this opening description of the novel portrays the very essence of Karl's heroism: his incessant willingness and desire to perceive, contemplate, and imagine within a seemingly illogical world, while keeping his capacity for wonder intact.

Karl's unique form of heroism—that is, the heroism of perception—becomes apparent when contrasting it with the more traditional notions of heroism that critics use to make sense of Kafka's protagonist. Heinz Politzer describes the purpose of *Amerika* as "the growth, both personal and intellec-

tual, of Karl Rossmann” (qtd. in Payne 30). This desire to see Karl Rossmann as a conventional rags-to-riches American immigrant hero is prevalent among the novel’s critics. In his article “How American is *Amerika*?” Carl Steiner describes Karl as being a force of good opposing a constant force of evil; in a world that exemplifies “materialism, brutality, lack of faith, anti-intellectualism, and hatred of anything beautiful and unspoiled,” Karl Rossmann embodies “the very antithesis to all these vices. He is idealistic, kind, trusting, naïve, honest, and above all, willing to draw positive inferences from his negative experiences” (462). While Steiner applauds Rossmann’s idealism, Kenneth Payne reads him as a failure of the “straight and narrow of the Franklinesque success formula—industry, frugality, self-improving study, not to overlook chastity” (37). While I agree that Karl does possess these supposedly self-advancing qualities, I think Payne is hasty in suggesting that Karl “follows the straight and narrow” and in deeming him to be a failure. Karl’s destabilization of the linear path to success is explicit when he “choose[s] a direction at random, and set[s] off” from the country house near New York, and it is just this dismissal of conventional norms and order, and his willingness to see beyond the constructs of the stereotypical “American Dream,” that characterizes his heroism.

Karl’s heroic sight is first introduced through the recurring motif of windows. Throughout the text, windows represent both a field of vision and a dividing boundary between separate and distinct spheres. In the first chapter, “The Stoker,” windows act as a lens through which one can observe other social classes without actually having to be a part of their world. Upon meeting the stoker, Karl explains, “Just outside the room where I slept with the Slovak there was a little porthole, and through it we could see the engine-room,” to which the stoker responds, “Yes, that’s where I was working” (5). Upon seeing an immigrant performing hard labor literally in the underbelly of society, Karl reacts by crying out “joyfully, as though that surpassed all expectations, and propp[ing] himself up on his elbow to take a closer look at the man” (5). What is envisioned by the stoker as a type of hell, and by the executives of the ship as subhuman, is seen by Karl as an impressive and appealing realm, one he would readily join. The established social boundaries that are represented by the window are punctured by Karl’s vision, his disregard of them as legitimate dividers, and his elevation of the seemingly low through sincere excitement about new possibilities.

When Karl becomes a part of the cityscape, he finds that his active ability and desire to see through such social constructs does not align with the consciousness of the American public. The sentiment that the Head Cook at the Hotel Occidental expresses in her defense of Karl to the Head Waiter emerges as a sadly appropriate epigraph for his day-to-day existence. She says,

“it’s not necessary to torment a boy who’s all on his own, because the rest of the world will see to that anyway” (123). In the moments when Karl relies the most on the inherent good in others to uphold justice based on a scale of human equality rather than wealth and status, he is repeatedly abandoned under their watchful eyes. While being bullied by the Head Porter in his lodge, which is “entirely made up of enormous glass panels, through which you could see the crowds of people flowing into one another in the lobby, just as clearly as if one were in their midst,” Karl is astonished that “hardly one of them failed to throw a glance into the porter’s lodge” (131). For Karl, the fact that vision is possible through the glass eliminates the division between people, and he feels “as if . . . in their midst.” For the hotel occupants, though, these boundaries allow for a justified space of comfortable disinterest. While rigid bureaucratic systems act as a major oppressive force for Karl, what seems more frightening are the evils that are performed by everyday citizens who allow for these injustices to occur by not looking. All of these occurrences reinforce the dual thematic importance of the window motif: a frame that determines what is seen and, equally if not more importantly, how one chooses to see it. Karl’s heroic vision seeks to include and fairly assess everyone and everything, unlike the averted stare of those who continuously ostracize him through their indifference.

The theme of sight continues to play a suggestive role in judging the power structures at work in this landscape. The perverse hierarchical structure that exists between characters is evident in the balcony scene at Brunelda’s apartment. In this scene, Brunelda’s opera glasses function as a symbol of dominant perception and a tool for oppression. When Brunelda forces Karl to look down at the procession, he feels despair, but being forced to see through the corrupt lens of dominance and power completely debilitates him: “He didn’t find it a kindness, more a nuisance when she put the glasses up to his eyes. . . . And then Karl had the glasses in front of him, and could see nothing at all” (169). Even though it seems that Karl is temporarily blinded, his inability to see through the opera glasses is not a handicap. Rather, it is an ironic sign of his heroic sensibility that functions outside of the framework of dominant, mainstream perspective. Not everyone is able to escape the power of being forced into this particular worldview. His fellow servant, Robinson, fully accepts the role that he has been told to fill. He says, “I’m an outcast. And if you’re treated like a dog the whole time, you end up thinking that’s what you are.” Karl, though, realizes the absurdity of such enforced identity and refuses to abide by it. He claims, “these sort of things only hold good if you agree to be bound by them” (156). Even though Karl is a servant, he is less a slave than those who control him, who are themselves enslaved by the corrupt values of wealth and status that define their existence. Karl’s sense of self is unique in

that it is incomplete and undetermined; although he fills roles, he does not allow them to define him, and he operates on a doctrine of inspired uncertainty that allows him to see beyond the constrictive lens of American dominance.

What makes Karl's vision heroic is not just the fact that he sees beyond established social perspectives, but that he does not become disillusioned by the possibility of non-definition. Karl is constantly aware of the unknowable, elusive aspect of his new environment, and of life in general. When he first embarks on his journey with Delamarche and Robinson, he struggles to observe an obscure ship in the harbor that "was impossible to trace, because it eluded one's eyes and couldn't be found again" (74). The ambiguity of Karl's perception is opposed by the certainty of Robinson and Delamarche's assertions of tangible landmarks. Karl notes that they "evidently saw much more, they pointed this way and that, and with their hands they arced towards squares and gardens, which they referred to be name" (74). The world that they seem to conquer with knowledge of it, however, does not recognize their ridiculous and seemingly meaningless presence: "So they gave a little open air performance in which they all participated, only the city below them, for whose benefit it was supposed to be, seemed unaware of it" (75-76). Karl's vision is heroic not only because it is open-minded and all-encompassing, but also because it operates on an awareness and acceptance of his inability to know. In his article "The Fiction of the Castrating Power of America," Ahmed Farouk Elbeshlawy takes issue with Kafka's indecisive protagonist, stating that he "seems to be devoid of any erotic questions," and denigrates how Karl, "as Kafkaesque hero," responds to his ever-changing world: "America does not seem to be more eager to impose any specific role on him than to dumbfound him by its very heterogeneity. From all the choices it offers him, he is unable to choose anything" (167). But this wariness of choices and avoidance of being categorized by any specific role completely is what allows Karl's survival in a world that otherwise exists to belittle him.

Karl exhibits an incessant desire to look out and see the new world in which he lives despite the possibility of facing the incomprehensible. Like the windows of the ship that brings him over to America, Karl continues to be compelled by windows and borders. Uncle Jacob understood the dangers of transgressing boundaries, and forbid Karl "the pleasure of standing out on the balcony" (29). In "The March to Ramses," however, Karl is able to observe the beauty that exists within these porous spaces. Karl sees the windows that "trembled with all sorts of movement and light," and observes how the hanging laundry "fluttered in the morning wind and ballooned hugely," while "covering and uncovering" the "women and children" (73). The permeability of these boundaries in the American landscape is evident from the constant movement that surrounds them. Such energy scares Uncle Jacob because it

represents transformation, malleability, and fluidity—attributes that threaten the possibility of American success. This blurring of borders distorts the binaries of existence that create order and stability—rich/poor, master/slave, American/foreign—and the possibility for meaning therein. What exists between these binaries is that which cannot be understood or easily identified. But, even if Karl cannot understand, he continues to look through windows, driven by curiosity, wonder, and the desire to constantly pursue that which eludes him.

Much critical controversy exists surrounding the actual title of Kafka's constantly abandoned and revisited project. Steiner identifies the two camps: "the school of critics who have called it with Max Brod, 'Amerika' . . . or the increasingly vociferous group that insists on the retention of Kafka's tentative work title '*Der Verschollene*'" (456), which is translated as "The Missing Person" or "The Man Who Disappeared." Clearly, the controversial title indicates two specific parts that are directly related to one another: place (America) and person (Karl). Since Karl is characterized by his insatiable desire to see within a world that refuses to see him, the second English translation of *Der Verschollene*, which emphasizes his leaving the realm of sight, seems especially pertinent to my argument. But if Karl does disappear over the course of his journey, miraculously he never comes to deny that there is still a world there for him to see. Right up to the end of the novel, during his venture West, Karl "looked out of the window tirelessly" (218). In the last paragraph, he physically breaks the boundary, a window, that exists between himself and his new world, as he "leaned out . . . and tried in vain to see their peaks," and "with a finger . . . traced the direction in which [the cloven valleys] disappeared" (218). The final image of his proximity to the "little foaming wavelets . . . so close that the chill breath of them made [his face] shudder" indicates a physical convergence between the world outside of the window and the people who choose to see it. This physical confrontation with the world, though, is not like the harsh grasp of the Head Porter or the sharp pinches of the rebellious teenagers on the train; rather, it is a gentle mist that invokes a reaction that is commensurate to its own beautiful incomprehensibility: a shudder. Of fear? Of delight? Of humor or despair? Of some combination of these conflicting emotions? We cannot know. But, with this end, we can assume that Karl will continue to follow his Uncle Jacob's advice "to absorb and examine everything, but not allow himself to be captured by it" (29). Although the advice is applied for different ends than those his Uncle originally foresaw, the last scene suggests that Karl will continue to see the world and actively engage with it through conscious contemplation and, perhaps more importantly, an imagination infused with wonder that, if nothing else, inspires him to constantly pursue a tomorrow.

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Beyond the Haunted House: Urban Space as Medium in
Austerlitz

Lee Conell

W. G. Sebald's prose is imbued with a kind of phantasmal emanation, a haunting quality that is due in part to the otherworldliness of characters that float from place to place, voicing their stories through multiple forms of mediation (photographs, blueprints, ticket stubs, nameless narrators). Yet the ghosts of memory and times past in *Austerlitz* are to be found not only in these detached voices, but also in the constructed spaces through which these same characters drift. Through the inclusion of visual images and built-in layers of narrative voices (most of the characters' communications are relayed through Austerlitz's communication with the novel's narrator, who finally relays that information to us), we experience the novel's urban spaces not just as phantom places, but as multivalent mediums through which the spirits of the past may contact those in the present, and vice versa. This contact between the past and the present does not occur to frighten or titillate the reader. Rather, the horrors and hauntings within these constructed places serve the higher purposes of heightening our awareness of the novel's constructions and mediation techniques, while simultaneously encouraging a greater empathy and connection with the past hidden beneath the foundations of our most carefully planned urban edifices and beneath language itself.

That language has the potential to bring us in touch with fragments of the past, with the once real, and with the unreal, is understood by anyone who has heard a ghost story or read about an historical event. Sebald takes this potential of language to the next level, using *Austerlitz* to reveal to us the destruction and phantasmal qualities inherent not just to the dead and ostensibly historical, but also to that which still exists and perhaps that which is to come. Lynne Sharon Schwartz notes that Sebald's "language and breadth of vision combined in a slow burn, and by the light of that combustion, we could glimpse what we have come from and what we have arrived at. Even, in a few dark, prophetic passages, where we're going" (9). Schwartz is referring to a passage in *Austerlitz* that seems to foreshadow the September 11th fall of the Twin Towers: "somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins" (Sebald 19). Of course, this vatic quality in Sebald's prose is achieved not by oracular powers, but by *Austerlitz's* acknowledgment that throughout history our grandiose attempts at large

structures and systems, including the sprawl of a city, have automatically contained within themselves a haunted quality, that is, the ghosts of their future destruction and the zeitgeists of past architectural designs. *Austerlitz* suggests we might ultimately connect and communicate with these spirits. This paper will look at two towns out of many in *Austerlitz* that exemplify this idea.

Perhaps the most explicit example of ghostly places in the novel occurs in the village Llanwddyn, destroyed in the march toward progress. Elias, the preacher who serves as Austerlitz's paternal caretaker after he is separated from his family and sent on the Kindertransport, informs the young Austerlitz of the submersion of Llanwddyn, his childhood village, a submersion that took place due to the building of the Vyrnwy reservoir. Elias tells Austerlitz "about his family home lying down there at a depth of about a hundred feet under the dark water, and not just his own family home but at least forty other houses and farms, together with the church of St. John of Jerusalem, three chapels, and three pubs, all of them drowned when the dam was finished in the autumn of 1888" (51). In Llanwddyn, we see what it looks like when the seed of destruction in our buildings reaches full bloom. Yet this destroyed space allows for a certain connection to be forged between past and present. After Elias shares the story of the destruction of his childhood home, Austerlitz feels a sudden keen empathy for the man:

At this one moment on the Vyrnwy dam when, intentionally or unintentionally, he allowed me a glimpse into his clerical heart, I felt for him so much that he, the righteous man, seemed to me like the only survivor of the deluge which had destroyed Llanwddyn, while I imagined all the others—his parents, his brothers and sisters, his relations, their neighbors, all the other villagers—still down in the depths, sitting in their houses and walking along the road, but unable to speak and with their eyes opened far too wide. (51)

Austerlitz's moment of empathy for Elias stems not only from a rare instance of autobiographical disclosure by Elias, but also from Austerlitz's sudden vision of a community of mute ghosts, lives whose destruction he imagines to have taken place alongside the destruction of the village in which they existed. The ghostliness of these people is intimately tied to the destroyed spaces they once inhabited. Sebald suggests that our understanding of the people who lived in the village is mediated by our knowledge of their destroyed constructed space.

Descriptions of this destroyed village are provided to us not only through the lens of our narrator (who gets his information from Austerlitz, who gets his information from Elias), but through actual images. Austerlitz notes, "This notion of mine about the subaquatic existence of the people of

Llanwddyn also had something to do with the album which Elias first showed me on our return home that evening, containing several photographs of his birthplace, now sunk beneath the water” (52). This album plays a key role as a medium that allows Austerlitz not only to visualize and imagine the urban space of the past, but also to connect to it and to an extent make it live again. Richard Crownshaw notes that “Photography illuminates the potential for the surreal memory focused by such objects, extending their animation or endowment with an afterlife. In other words, for Austerlitz, photographs might seem to resurrect their referents.” Yet these photographs do not alter just Austerlitz’s experience of the drowned village, but also our own understanding of mediation in the novel. A black and white image of a mother and child walking among houses we know are now under water, a portrait of a little girl holding a dog—the meaning of these photographs is translated to us through Sebald’s placement of them at strategic points in the text. This clear *construction* slows the immediacy of the images’ effect and suggests that their total significance to us as readers depends on the greater context of the novel’s design, on the way these images are presented to us through Austerlitz and our narrator and Sebald himself. Ultimately, the people in these photographs, because they are “reflected” to us not only through a camera lens, but also through layers of voices, through our knowledge of the destroyed constructed space they inhabit, and through the narrative at large, are among the novel’s most obviously mediated ghostly figures. Thus, the visual medium, like the urban environment, is played with and questioned through the context of the novel, which is presented as a constructed space that refuses to let us forget the fact that even photography is not truly objective and immediate, but passed to us through at least one lens (and in *Austerlitz* through many lenses). In an article examining photography in *Austerlitz* as “a locus of trauma rather than as a transparent device of historical testimony,” Samuel Pane notes, “Sebaldian photographs . . . manifest the disparity between the catastrophic events of history and the ability of human memory and archival technology to accurately recall them.” *Austerlitz*’s photographs refuse us an easy transparency and therefore haunt us even more by forcing us to recognize not only the subject depicted in the photograph, but also the ghost behind the lens.

As the novel continues, the ghost behind the lens becomes Austerlitz himself. A series of events leads Austerlitz to suddenly remember that, as a five-year-old child, he was separated from his true parents and sent on a *Kindertransport*, away from the escalating violence and persecution against Jews. Raised by a family that was not his own and unaware of his own history, Austerlitz is led by these unforeseen recollections of his childhood to explore his parents’ past, an exploration that does not take place merely through his study of books and archives, but through his need to immerse himself in the

materiality of urban spaces his parents inhabited. Thus, he visits Terezín, now a town, but formerly the site of the concentration camp to which he learns his mother was sent. Terezín is almost abandoned of human life, a blurry reflection of Llanwddyn; Austerlitz sees one human figure, yet “when I took my eye off it for a moment, the figure had suddenly gone” (189). What follows in the text is a series of photographs of façades, shuttered windows and doors that stare out like transmogrified and closed off human faces. If these façades and objects become strangely human, the face of Austerlitz, peering at a display in a storefront window, becomes almost objectified: “They [the objects in the display] . . . had outlived their former owners and survived the process of destruction, so that I could now see my own faint shadow image barely perceptible among them (197). Looking into the windows of Terezín, the narrator finds that his own identity is filtered through these past times. He himself becomes as ghostly as the objects he sees, if not ghostlier; the photograph depicting one of these objects shows the specter-like reflection of the photographer, which has the effect of reminding us that the photograph is mediated (we see that the camera is being aimed by a human being) and that, by extension, the novel that presents this image must be mediated as well, aimed at us in some way. The constructedness of the text at hand and the many ghosts haunting and mediating its narrative are made obvious.

Why foreground mediation? Failing to recognize the constructedness of either a narrative or an urban space may, Sebald suggests, have dangerous and detrimental effects, as we see in the remaking of the Terezín ghetto into what the novel describes as a kind of “Potemkin village or sham Eldorado” (244). Because of a visit by the Red Cross, Austerlitz tells us, the Germans reconstruct Terezín into a place that appears a cheerful and functional town providing its prisoners with a resort-like experience:

Pathways and a grove with a columbarium were laid out, park benches and signposts were set up, the latter adorned in the German fashion with jolly carvings and floral decoration. . . . There was also a convalescent home, a chapel, a lending library, a gymnasium, a post office, a bank. (242, 244)

The remade Terezín is then presented and manipulated further when it is recorded in a film, which “was given a sound track of Jewish folk music in March 1945, when a considerable number of the people who had appeared in it were no longer alive” (244). By the time the film is shown, many of the inhabitants of Terezín are dead, transforming the already mediated figures of the film into a vision even more spectral. Through the creation of this sham village and the film made about it, we see the sinister side of a mediation that attempts to appear transparent and non-manipulative, an attempt that might

also take place in an urban space, a movie, or a verbal text. If we do not see or question the lens through which Terezín is presented and manipulated, if we do not remember the agenda behind that lens and the consequent mediation, the true atrocities occurring under the surface are forgotten, lost to oblivion, never to be recovered.

Yet even within the horror of the ghetto-turned-sham-town, mediation, when it is recognized, offers some hope of an enriching empathy and reunion between past and present. When Austerlitz begins to fantasize about seeing the S.S.-made film and recognizing his mother, he imagines her walking among others until “she alone seemed to make straight for me, coming closer with every step, until at last I thought I could sense her stepping out of the frame and passing over into me” (245). The film provides fodder for Austerlitz’s hope that he might not only see his mother again but be reunited with her. He imagines transcending the mediating lens and experiencing her in an immediate way. Ironically, then, it is the mediation of Terezín that inspires Austerlitz’s dream of cutting through such mediation.

In the context of the novel, is such a dream possible? Only in the imagination of Austerlitz, which, in turn, exists in the imagination of the reader accessing the space of the constructed, and to at least some extent fictive, text. Thus, mediation through language can bring to life not only the dead, but also the unreal, a process Sebald hints at several times. In a hotel with Austerlitz, Marie de Verneuil claims that “she had the impression that although everything else was in perfect order, the writing desk had not been dusted for years. What can be the explanation, she asked me, said Austerlitz, of this remarkable phenomenon? Do ghosts haunt the desk, I wonder?” (209). The connection that writing and narrative can grant us to the ghosts of the past, and even the present, is suggested again when the narrator notes, “I went through a difficult period which dulled my sense of other people’s existence, and from which I only very gradually emerged by turning back to the writing I had long neglected” (34). Other people had become, to the narrator, slightly unreal, until he turned to writing, to the textual mediation process that, through the distance it provides, allows for both the past and the present to become clearer, nearer to our own minds, just as urban spaces have the potential to do.

This clarity and the connections Sebald establishes between ghosts, memory, constructed language, and constructed spaces suggest that if we wish to communicate with what seems phantasmal and unreal, including our own memories, history, and the people of our past, we might turn to the medium of both language spaces and urban spaces. By the end of the novel, Austerlitz has finished no book, nor are his urban wanderings complete. Yet the novel itself, through its peregrinations to ghostly towns like Llanwddyn and Terezín, and through the urban centers that it delineates, builds for us a

space that we as readers can inhabit. Utilizing both visual and verbal means, Sebald makes his own mediating force obvious, so that we never entirely lose sight of the glass that allows us to see into the windows of the novel. Through these windows, we begin to recognize and connect with haunting events, with places and people that potentially once seemed unreal; by resurrecting history into our own present moment, we may ultimately find ourselves able to connect with the partially buried past Sebald brings to life.

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Medieval and Modern Race in *Othello*

Selena Hughes

When we read and discuss the problem of race in Shakespeare's *Othello*, there is the tendency of either understanding the racial dynamics of the play in a modern light or disregarding the issue of race for other issues that are then seen as more central to the play. Robert Bartlett, in his essay "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," argues that there is a distinct difference between modern and medieval ways of understanding race. He defines the modern as "a distinction based on inherited biological features, [such as] skin color," whereas "the medieval notion points to cultural differences between groups" (39). However, I find that making these sharp distinctions between the medieval and modern limits our understanding of the role race plays in *Othello*. Therefore, I suggest that a more blended view of race is needed in the discussion of this play. One way to understand how this view works is to use the tradition of courtly love and the medieval romance to prop up what Lisa Lampert calls "the more malleable" concepts of race (392). While Bartlett's definition of modern race is sufficient, I will use the thirteenth-century German romance *Parzival*, by Wolfram von Eschnbach, to stand in for the medieval ethos of race. The romantic relationship between the European knight Gahmuret and the African Queen Belacane in *Parzival* will allow me to gauge whether *Othello* is nearer the medieval or moving away toward the modern concept of race.

It is interesting to note that *Othello*'s race becomes an issue only through his relationship with Desdemona, which is similar to the relationship between Gahmuret and Belacane in *Parzival*. For this reason it is necessary to see how the European conventions of courtly love are used to attribute Otherness to *Othello*, since prior to his marriage he was an accepted member of European society. To illustrate, I will use *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus, a pithy, Emily Post style guide to courtly love published at the end of the twelfth century. Its tenets are reflected in many romantic and chivalric tales.

Lampert argues that *Othello* opens in the medieval ethos with the acceptance of *Othello* into the Venetian Christian society, though in a limited capacity (392). By accepting *Othello*, the Venetians put a veneer of Euro-ethnicity on him as well as a veneer of Christianity. Yet, once *Othello* marries, the limitations of his acceptance in the Venetian society are exposed. Barbantio perceives *Othello*'s marriage to his Venetian daughter to be out of bounds. To the Venetians, *Othello* is acting on presumption; therefore, it is necessary for them to expel him from their society by positioning him as an Other.

As this secret marriage is uncovered, the Venetians identify Othello as the Moor. Iago mocks Othello's superior position in the Venetian military by calling himself "his Moorship's ancient" (1.1.35) and by mocking Othello's past in Africa or Arabia. While Iago uses cultural differences to Other Othello, Roderigo follows by using Othello's physical traits to insult him: "What's full fortune does the thick-lips owe / If he can carry 't thus," (1.1.72-73). The progression of defining Othello moves from mocking his cultural past to reducing him to a body part and lastly to superimposing animal attributes on him with emphasis on color: "old black ram"(1.1.97) and "Barbary horse"(1.1.125). At the outset of the play medieval and the modern concepts of race are in equal measure; moving between the two is a seamless action.

Once the secret is out, the first change in Othello and Desdemona's relationship is their admiration for each other. As Iago paints Desdemona as unfaithful, Othello alters from a rational man to a passionate creature as each loses respect for the other. Othello is known to be a warrior of bravery and valor, and according to Capellanus, the beloved ought to seek a lover who is praiseworthy in character, rather than seek beauty. Othello is able to achieve this when he recounts how he won Desdemona to the senate. In their secret relationship, Othello is able to retain this perception of his character for Desdemona. William Meader, in his book *Courtship in Shakespeare; Its Relation to the Tradition of Courtly Love*, notes that "most of Shakespeare's lovers display courage at some time before the conclusion of the play" (76). However, Othello does not display valor but only talks about it. Othello dawdles over whether to reinstate Cassio into service, and Desdemona accuses her husband of "Mamm'ring" about. Capellanus states that in every respect the lover is supposed to appear wise and restrained in his actions (25). However, in Act Four when Othello strikes Desdemona in the presence of Lodovico, a Venetian Duke, he is further separating himself from proper courtly love traditions by exhibiting Orientalized behavior. Due to this uncontrolled and uncivilized behavior, Othello positions himself as the Oriental Other in need of outside control. By not acting, Othello is further emasculated.

Shakespeare emphasizes Othello's otherness by placing increased significance on Desdemona's handkerchief. The mysticism associated with Asian and Arab nations is first attributed to Othello by Barbantio's claim that Othello "charmed" Desdemona into marriage. Yet, Othello takes these claims and uses them to self-identify. The inability of Othello to assert his own identity and maintain the respect of his peers points to the stripping away of his current national allegiance to Venice and return to his former African/Arabian allegiance. These cultural differences are behavioral and drive a wedge between Othello and Desdemona.

The expression of these differences is akin to the medieval understand-

ing of race. In *Parzival*, cultural differences are similarly shown through Belacane's behavior. She is depicted as irrational, and her manner does not adhere to the proper female social custom of late medieval European society. One such custom involves the pouring wine, which gives her control of the party, "because it always drove the knights away who liked talking to a woman" (18). Belacane attracts Gahmuret because of her beauty and womanly manner, yet, as the relationship progresses, Belacane is increasingly depicted as one who takes charge, representing her actions as unwomanly. One of the power anxieties between Belacane and Gahmuret is an understanding of the role of men and women. This is highlighted when Lady Herzeloyde rightly acquiesces to let Gahmuret seek knightly deeds, whereas Belacane does not. Gahmuret writes in his desertion letter that the difference in religion is the cause of his leaving. In reality, Gahmuret leaves Belacane not simply because of religious differences, but due to the power she holds over him by not letting him fight in tournaments. The interplay of gender is not masked by ideas of ethnicity, as in *Othello*, but is concealed in the language of religion.

Othello claims to be rude in his speech, yet twice does he express his adoration for Desdemona (2.1.199-217 and 3.3.100-02) in the presence of Iago. Capellanus warns that if lovers speak freely of their beloved, it will open their relationship to "malicious gossip" (25). Iago notices Othello's veneration for his wife, and as Iago destroys Desdemona's character, he encourages Othello to associate her with heavenly terms as he continues to undo Othello. Othello refers to Desdemona as, "A fine / woman. A fair woman" (4.1.197-98). By Act Five Othello, fully aware of his error, imagines that a look from the dead Desdemona "will hurl [his] soul from heaven" (5.2.325). The move to a modern understanding of race is in the language Othello uses, which symbolize heaven and hell in terms of black and white.

This is a different idea of race than that presented in the opening to *Parzival*, where racial differences imply not biological characteristics, but an attitude about the condition of the soul. The soul is depicted in religious language similar to that of *Othello*, and in the opening of *Parzival* heaven and hell are in terms of black and white. Both are in every a person's soul, yet only the "white" part of a person's soul will allow him into heaven (3). In Queen Belacane's kingdom, the same veneration of whiteness or purity is illustrated when the people of her kingdom see Gahmuret and supposes that their African gods must look like him (22). The confluence of religion and biological complexion blurs the line Bartlett tries to draw between the medieval and modern. *Parzival* and *Othello* use complexion to denote a racial differences. Yet in *Parzival* complexion emphasizes the state of the soul, while in *Othello* complexion predestines one to heaven and others to hell.

One side effect of Othello's veneration of Desdemona, coupled with

Iago's manipulation, is an obsession with Othello's skin color. Courtly love conventions repeatedly state that a proper lover ought not to be excessively concerned about his appearance. Iago begins to use color to signify character traits in Act Three, scene three by suggesting that proper, natural judgment would have Desdemona married to a Venetian rather than continuing to be united to Othello, a Moor. Othello begins to connect color to biological traits, starting with himself: "Haply, for I am black / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chambers have" (3.3.304-06). As mentioned above, Othello was eloquent enough to win Desdemona with his tales of adventure, and he also spoke well enough to convince the Venetian senate that he did not charm Desdemona into marriage. However, in these lines Othello draws a false parallel between his color and his speaking ability that is false.

Othello also associates Desdemona with the color white or goodness. Even while he is berating her in Act Four, he refers to her as "fair paper, this most goodly book" (4.2.82). For Othello, her complexion is considered good, while her supposed infidelity is associated with Othello's complexion: "Her name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black / As mine own face" (3.3.441-43). Inferring biological traits from color is to situate "race" in the modern sense: Desdemona, as a Venetian, is inherently good. Though her actions are considered immoral, they are not a part of her; for Othello, linking such immorality to himself is a "natural" correlation. By paying excessive attention to his appearance, he misrepresents his own abilities and accepts Iago's Othering language.

The correlation between complexion and inherent personality traits is not the same in *Parzival*. Complexion does not correlate to inherent personality, but it does categorize people in a hierarchy. In this medieval society the inherent personality that cannot be overcome is one's nobility. Belacane was noted to have the proper womanly qualities despite her complexion: "A woman's manner she did have, and was on other counts worthy of a knight, but she was unlike a dewy rose: her complexion was black of hue" (14). In the court of Queen Belacane there are many parallels between the African kingdom and the European, French court. What is inherent is nobility and aristocratic deportment. Unlike Belacane, Othello's nobility is removed the more he self-identifies with the racial Other.

By the conclusion of the play Othello is a source of contempt to himself. He now knows that Iago is false, and yet Othello never rejects the Othering language that Iago initiates. Capellanus states, "Furthermore a lover should make every attempt to be constantly in the company of good men and avoid completely the society of the wicked. For association with the vulgar makes a lover who joins them a thing of contempt to his beloved" (26).

In the concluding scene, Montano labels Othello a "monster" (5.2.226)

and calls Iago a “notorious villain” (5.2.286). The *OED* defines monsters as “mythical creatures part animal and part human (A.1.a.). It also defines monster as a malformed animal incompatible with life (A.3.a.). Just as Othello never challenges the binary language used by Iago, he also accepts this label. Iago remains human since villains are brought to justice for their crime. Othello is not human but a monster and therefore does not seek a trial when one is offered to him (5.2.389-96). From lines 291 of Act Five, scene two to the last lines of his speech, Othello goes through a costume change with language. Before he can put on his new identity, he has to take off the Venetian identity given to him with the following lines: “I am not valiant neither, / But every puny whipster gets my sword / . . . Let it go all” (5.2.291-92, 294). With his Venetian sword taken away, Othello internalizes his Otherness by identifying with various non-Europeans: “a sward of Spain” (Moor), “base Judean” (alternatively “Indian”), “turbaned Turk”, and “circumcisèd dog” (Jewish). In the end the vulgar company makes Othello a source of contempt to all that he loved from the Venetian state to Desdemona.

Bartlett suggests that there is a difference in the medieval understanding of race and the modern. However, in *Othello* it is clear that the medieval/modern divide presented by Bartlett is not definitive. Othello and Belacane both fail in their relationships because they acquiesce to the European language and European convention, which perceives their racial difference as negative. The use of race in *Othello* seamlessly straddles the medieval/modern divide, which allows for a more complex understanding of how race affects this tragedy and Othello’s inability to escape his fall.

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“Make This Talk”: The Power of Lineage in *Philadelphia Fire* and *The Tempest*

Liz Bonhag

Much criticism of *Philadelphia Fire* focuses on the relationship between black fathers and sons as the backbone of a strong resistance against white oppression. Mary Paniccia Carden summarizes this critical perspective: “Remembering Penn’s invocation of a new, egalitarian city and mode of citizenship, Wideman tracks the relation of contemporary African-American men to a national history defined in and as white male authority and ownership” (475). She continues that *Philadelphia Fire* demonstrates that “the relationship between black fathers and sons has been colonized and damaged by white claims to foundational masculinity, claims that root manhood . . . in discourses, objects, and material positions withheld from black fathers, uninheritable by black sons” (475-76). Indeed, white ownership and authority throughout American history has significantly affected the lineage of black families. I recall my sister’s experience of meeting a black woman with our maiden name, Kelso. My sister remarked to her that she had never met a black person named Kelso (it being a Scottish name), and the woman responded that she had never met a *white* person named Kelso. Although lighthearted, this interaction brought up the much darker implication that the name had crossed racial boundaries due to the same issues of white ownership (in this case most likely through slavery) and denial of black patronymic lineage that Wideman scrutinizes in *Philadelphia Fire*.

It becomes apparent that, for Wideman, patronymic lineage – being given your father’s name – is the ultimate conferment of power from one generation to the next. In his autobiographical text on the subject, *Fatheralong*, Wideman writes:

What’s your name? American history can be read as a long paternity suit. . . . Think of our country as a vast orphanage. . . . For the majority of Americans, the issues of paternity and patrimony are settled. To be white is to be connected to the Great White Father, the ultimate source of power, privilege, and legitimacy. For the minority who can’t claim to be white, the issue is also settled. But less happily. (82)

Here Wideman expands the issue from one of degraded manhood (the terminology used in Carden’s criticism) to one of disempowerment. There is reason to believe that for Wideman, power and manhood are closely linked, perhaps even one and the same. This is evidenced by the fact that although he seems

to criticize America's "paternity suit," what Wideman actually criticizes is that minorities cannot use it to claim power for themselves in the same way that white people can. He seems to have no problem recasting patriarchy itself and advocates its reestablishment in black communities in an effort at empowerment. Indeed, Wideman states that a person who does not have a father is orphaned. This completely nullifies motherhood and renders maternal lineage meaningless.

In order to make the argument that the American racial power struggle is based upon issues of patronymic lineage, Wideman must somehow reduce the importance of women. If women hold just as much power as men and female lineage holds just as much meaning as male lineage (which we know to be a biological fact), then the argument that connection to the "Great White Father" provides the "ultimate source of power, privilege and legitimacy" becomes at most a half-truth. When viewed from the standpoint of gender equity, Wideman's argument becomes very tenuous. This is why *Philadelphia Fire* attempts to portray women as fragmented parts that exist primarily for male pleasure and ownership, and as a vehicle through which to perpetuate their lineage, rather than as whole people with autonomy and rights over (at the very least) their own bodies. An examination of Wideman's use of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* similarly reveals that Miranda's rights over her body are trumped by both Prospero's and Caliban's claims to power on the island.

The deconstruction of female identity in *Philadelphia Fire* begins almost immediately, in Cudjoe's description of "a dark haired lady" (6). Wideman does not give this woman a name – he only refers to her by her hair color and gender – suggesting that in Cudjoe's mind her hair is the most meaningful aspect of her identity; her name is inconsequential. Her importance in the novel is that she unsuccessfully attempted to teach Cudjoe "the Greek for her body parts. Hair is . . . eyes are . . . nose is . . . the Greek words escaping him even as he hears them. But he learns the heat of her shoulders, curve of bone beneath the skin. No language she speaks is his" (6, ellipses in original). Immediately Wideman illustrates his protagonist's disconnect from women in the novel. Not even for a second is Cudjoe able to hear, learn from, or understand this woman. The only things he is able to know about her are superficial, sexualized, and targeted toward his use of her: "the heat of her shoulders," for example. And this, it appears, he teaches himself. The voice of the dark haired lady is thus effectively removed from the text. Wideman immediately conveys to readers the unimportance of female knowledge, identity, and voice and the importance of women's bodies through which men can procreate and pleasure themselves. Certainly in Cudjoe's case the body is the only aspect of the dark haired lady worth remembering.

When Cudjoe confronts himself regarding his reductive view of female

identity, the text blatantly excuses him from engaging the question of sexism. Cudjoe stares “like a dummy” (27) at a woman’s uncovered crotch in Clark Park. Seemingly aware of the heavily sexualized descriptions of women in the narrative, Cudjoe asks himself: “What was he looking for in women’s bodies” (27)? The question is quickly dismissed: “Surely he’d have tripped over it trudging up and back those golden beaches on Mykonos. But no. The mystery persisted” (27). Although the narration pauses to question the treatment of females in the novel, the immediate refusal to actively engage the issue negates any possibility that this is a serious concern. Perhaps the reason the “mystery” of Cudjoe’s constant objectification of women persists is that his plan for resolving the problem is to accidentally “trip over” the answer. The fact that such a blasé response satisfies Cudjoe’s meaningful question demonstrates the frivolity with which Wideman treats female identity in *Philadelphia Fire*.

Another voyeuristic encounter reveals more about how men view women in the novel. Cudjoe spies on his editor’s teenage daughter, Cassy, as she takes an outdoor shower. When Cudjoe begins to feel that his leering is inappropriate, he directs his mental apologies to Sam, Cassy’s father, instead of to Cassy herself. This is an odd thing to do. It’s Cassy whose privacy is being violated, not Sam’s. We learn that the reason Cudjoe feels sorry toward Sam is because Cassy represents her father’s “last goddamned chance” at purity in his life; he himself has “sinned grievously” (65). It becomes clear, then, that in Cudjoe’s mind, Cassy is less deserving of consideration than the reputation of her father. Cudjoe even imagines a fight between himself and Sam over who has rights to Cassy, sexual rights for Cudjoe and paternal rights for Sam. He states that Sam would “probably try to kick Cudjoe’s ass. Old liver spotted fists flailing. Battering Cudjoe’s hard brown skin” (66). This fantasy fight over who has rights to Cassy leaves no room for Cassy to have rights to herself and does not even consider such a possibility. This struggle for power between men, like so many others in this novel, is played out at the expense and degradation of a woman.

The encounter with Cassy also leads Cudjoe to make a statement that women’s bodies are like cities. Cudjoe states that Cassy’s “fingers caress her breasts, rub the black patch of groin, preparing them, offering them to the same god at whom she stares, rapt, when she arches her neck, leans her head back on her shoulders. She welcomes him, drinks him into every pore of her body, her skin the thousand eyed gate of a great city thrown open to receive him” (63). Clearly, this fantasy-based “description” of what Cudjoe sees Cassy doing in the shower is rife with problematic assumptions, not the least of which being that Cudjoe positions himself to be not just *a* god but specifically *her* god. However, for my purposes I’d like to focus on a more subtle aspect of this passage, that of woman as city; I’ll leave analysis of the more blatantly

troubling statements to another critic.

Earlier in the novel, when viewing Philadelphia from the steps of the art museum, Cudjoe envisions Philadelphia speaking to him: “I belong to you, the city says. This is what I was meant to be. You can grasp the pattern. Makes sense of me. Connect the dots. I was constructed for you. Like a field of stars, I need you to bring me to life. My names, my gods poised on the tip of your tongue. All you have to do is speak and you reveal me, complete me” (44). This passage, describing how Cudjoe perceives Philadelphia, is strikingly similar to the one which describes how he perceives Cassy. Both the woman and the city, in his mind, look to him to make sense out of their fragmented parts. He is rendered godlike in comparison to their incomplete forms, and therefore is welcomed – urged even – to use them as he sees fit. As Carden puts it, “Philadelphia’s lines, zones, parts, and patterns offer more than affirmation of the founder’s colonial vision; they present a multifaceted cityscape that provides Cudjoe with opportunities to revise histories of white paternal domination” (483). It is in this way that, just as the racial power struggle between white and black men is played out on the cityscape of Philadelphia, so too is it played out on the bodies of women. Philadelphia is important primarily because whoever dominates the land can perpetuate their culture and increase their power and influence; similarly, women become important only inasmuch as whoever dominates them can perpetuate themselves and their lineage, which Wideman argues is the ultimate source of power, privilege, and legitimacy.

In the second part of this triptych novel, the character of Cudjoe becomes usurped by a character named John Edgar Wideman. John/Cudjoe stages a production of *The Tempest* with a cast of inner-city black youth. The significance of *The Tempest* is heavily emphasized in the text:

This is the central event. I assure you. I repeat. Whatever my assurance is worth. Being the fabulator. This is the central event, this production of *The Tempest* staged by Cudjoe in the late late 1960s, outdoors, in a park in West Philly. . . . *The Tempest* sits dead center . . . it is the bounty and hub of all else written about the fire, though it comes here . . . nearer the end than the beginning. (132)

What connection is there between *The Tempest* and Wideman’s work in *Philadelphia Fire*? Why is *The Tempest* so important? Jerry Varsava states that “Cudjoe rewrites *The Tempest* as an allegory of racial hate and colonialism. . . . In it [he] offers the most powerful, most eloquent critique of racism in the novel” and a “compelling deconstruction of the Caliban myth as codified in *The Tempest* and taught to literally millions of people since the early seventeenth century” (Varsava 437). In this way, *Philadelphia Fire*’s adoption of *The Tempest* casts the play in the same postcolonial light in which most critics

approach the novel itself. Yet, Jessica Slight's describes post-colonial readings of *The Tempest* as inherently problematic: "contemporary scholars dispense with Miranda in favor of analyses of the politically and culturally charged confrontation between Prospero and Caliban" (360). A reading of the text that dispenses with Miranda fails to acknowledge that she plays a central role in the confrontation between Prospero and Caliban; both men attempt to use her to reproduce their own power.

In his interpretation of the play, John/Cudjoe does not dispense with Miranda, but rather attacks her for not participating in Caliban's scheme for power on the island. He suggests that Miranda (and not Prospero) represents the greatest force of evil on the island due to her rejection of Caliban's sexual advances: "But is Caliban the snake on this island paradise or is the serpent wound round old Prospero's wand? Or is it Caliban's magic twanger, his Mr. William Wiggstaff he waggled at Miss Miranda and said: C'mere fine bitch. Make this talk" (140). The "serpent wound round old Prospero's wand" can be read as a scathing image of Miranda coupling with her father, an emblem of her allegiance to her father. Cudjoe sees Miranda's duty to her father as the reason that she deplores Caliban's attempt at raping her. He does not consider that she resists the rape because she does not want to be raped. It is fitting, given Cudjoe's earlier figuring of Cassy as her father's property, that he also sees Miranda as an agent working on behalf of her father rather than an autonomous being operating in her own interest. The threatening command at the end of John/Cudjoe's commentary – "C'mere fine bitch. Make this talk" – recalls the description of the dark haired lady who attempts to teach Cudjoe her language. Once again, Cudjoe threatens female knowledge, voice, and identity (as conveyed through female "talk") with his own sexually based evaluation of her worth. He stymies *her* attempt at communicating via words with *his* communication of sexual interest. This interpretation of *The Tempest* can also be read as a primitization (and thus a degradation) of Caliban, as it emphasizes Caliban's sexual and physical prowess over his mental capacities and asserts that his most essential power lay not in his mind or his voice, but in his mute genitalia.

Slight's analysis of *The Tempest* focuses on "Caliban's obsession with lineage and the direct threat that his fixation with dynasty poses to Miranda" (372). The points that Slight's makes about the relationship of Miranda to Caliban and Prospero are the exact points that I wish to make about the relationship of women to black and white men in *Philadelphia Fire*. Regarding his attempted rape of Miranda, Caliban directly states that his motivation was to reproduce himself and thus his power: "O ho, O ho," retorts Caliban, "would't had been done! / Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (qtd. in Slight's 372). This sentiment comes from the same place as

John/Cudjoe's assertion that the words "father" and "son" are "indications of time and the possibility of salvation, redemption, continuity" (103). The ultimate power in both cases comes from reproduction of male identity.

The obvious issue with reproducing male power in this way is the necessary use of a woman's body to achieve that power. Caliban's method of reclaiming power that Prospero had robbed him of via enslavement requires the objectification and abuse of Miranda, as Slight's argues:

Understanding Caliban as a moral agent, which entails acknowledging that he is wrong to try to rape Miranda, does not logically (and certainly not ethically) require either that we justify his enslavement or that we deny Miranda the right to freedom from violence. The assumption that both Miranda and Caliban cannot act simultaneously as moral agents in the life-world of *The Tempest* is the product, I suspect, of the epidemic of binary thinking that swept through academe as postcolonial criticism was gaining a hold in both North America and Britain. (375)

Wideman's advocacy of black patronymic lineage as a method of reclaiming power in America is the product of the same binary thinking that Slight's reprimands. He is right to address the problem of black male identity in a society scarred by white ownership and oppression, but his method of addressing the problem fails to acknowledge the negative implications it entails for women and their identities. A more effective approach to the issue would include the type of dialectical thinking that Slight's champions, which creates room for the rights of oppressed women as well as men.

In his recasting of Shakespeare's work in *Philadelphia Fire*, Wideman manages artfully to co-opt and reproduce the power of one of literature's "Great White Fathers." He positions himself as a recipient of a type of *literary* inheritance, which he then is able to pass on to the inner-city youth in the text, as well as to his readers. This *literary* form of reproduction transmits power without necessitating the use of a third party and is therefore a preferable model to the messy business of patronymic lineage. By direct inter-textual reproduction of Shakespeare's power, privilege, and legitimacy, Wideman expands the boundaries of lineage to encompass inheritance linked not to genes but instead to genres and lays authorial claim to a heritage that blood is too brutish to grant.

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Collusion and Human Identity in Roberto Bolaño's *By Night in Chile*

Sarah Hurd

Valerie Sayers suggests that Roberto Bolaño's fiction, "gives a sense of what it is like to live in the presence of torture, disappearance and death" (14). Roberto Bolaño's novella *By Night in Chile*, published in 2000, is set in a world where individual identity becomes an impetus for torture, punishment, and death. Pinochet's military dictatorship, lasting from the death of President Allende in 1973 until 1990, enacted a bloody conservative revolution and oppressed the population, weeding out all supposed Communists, Socialists, and opponents of the revolution. Father Lacroix, the protagonist of Bolaño's novella, is caught in the web of this political machine and struggles to negotiate within a new and oppressive world, where the totalitarian regime expects him to understand his identity through their external reality and to teach them the theoretical perspective of their enemies, Marxism.

By Night in Chile proposes a very dark reality and elaborates upon a familiar conceit: what would I do if forced to aid the enemy? Timothy Brennan suggests that the twentieth century revived the dignity of the human, in contrast to what he sees as "current humanist thought that de-prioritizes humans." Bolaño's novelistic interrogation of Father Lacroix exemplifies Brennan's belief that "the human became the true world universal." Lacroix becomes an accomplice of the coup, but in responding to external political motivations, he struggles to resist these pressures. In this paper, I want to examine three areas of the novella that suggest that, despite Lacroix's fallibilities and ultimate collusion, our empathy with him forces us to question our judgment of the character and ourselves. The struggle to conform begins with Lacroix's literary mentor, Farewell, and his initial attempt at indoctrination. Farewell's unwanted sexual advance prepares the ground for Father Lacroix's later collusion with the coup. Following the coup, Father Lacroix's desire to remain faithful to his beloved Chile challenges his political understanding of his homeland, thus causing him to misplace his allegiance. Finally, I will discuss why Father Lacroix's actions fall short, how this inactivity causes him to rethink his complicity. Through this retrospective book, Bolaño struggles to revive Father Lacroix's humanity by challenging our own.

Bolaño aligns the totalitarian oppression of Father Lacroix with the overtly intellectual oppression he experiences during his time with the critic, Farewell, before the coup. While at an intellectual gathering at Farewell's estate, Lacroix thinks: "they were talking about poetry, naturally . . . I remember that

I wanted to participate. . . . I chose to remain silent” (8). This scene of group complicity, cloaked under the veil of intellectual discussion, prefaces Farewell’s sexual indoctrination. This moment makes literature itself a hegemonic tool, a device the oppressor uses to gain control. Father Lacroix, surrounded by literature as totalitarian device, by the demand to belong, has significant trouble acknowledging his dangerous position. He “wanted to participate” (8); that is, he desires collusive immersion. What constitutes Father Lacroix’s “resistance,” though we can scarcely call it that, is not an active rebellion, but an intellectual lack of confidence, an internal discomfort.

This conversation foreshadows the sexual advance of Farewell, an allegorical representative of the Allende government: “Farewell’s hand squirmed like an earthworm . . . and detached itself from my belt, but the smile remained on his face” (14). Farewell’s advance combines unwanted sexuality with an interrogation of Father Lacroix’s intellectual capacity through a simultaneous discussion of the obscure poet Sordello. Here we see Farewell’s first attempt to reconstruct Father Lacroix’s identity by programming him into the world of obscure writers and the world of unwanted homosexuality, as if these two realms were axiomatically affixed within Allende’s old world order. Farewell appears to Father Lacroix like “the god Pan, or Bacchus in his den, or some demented Spanish conquistador . . . a snake” (9). These descriptors of Farewell relate to classical images of hedonism and reverie, clear associations to the Pinochetistas concern with the Allende government, condemned for its socialist reform policies that sought to control education and redistribute wealth.

Farewell’s infinite terror is a terror of hedonism (manifested in his unwarranted sexual advances to Father Lacroix), which directly speaks to popular criticism of Allende’s governing force. Allende’s classical approach to government—classical, meaning a direct interpretation of literary texts (the works of Marx)—coupled with his reform policies, suggests a terror of inapplicability. Father Lacroix, understanding Farewell as a surrogate of this governing body, feels this terror both intellectually (as a result of Farewell’s constant intellectual inquisition) and sexually, prompting an unsuccessful indoctrination into the Allende government that anticipates his collusion with Pinochet’s coup.

At the moment of the coup, Father Lacroix attempts to defend himself by using his intellectual identity to thwart the incoming totalitarianism: “When I got back to my house, I went straight to my Greek classics. Let God’s will be done, I said. I’m going to reread the Greeks” (81). Again, we see Father Lacroix recoiling from the political realm (not surprising since his unpleasant and unsuccessful indoctrination via Farewell). But he employs a useless approach. Father Lacroix turns to the classics to provide him with stability in an increasingly unstable world, as most of us similarly do, but this approach

only masks the current political turmoil. Father Lacroix notes, “I started with Homer . . . and then a pro-Allende general was killed” (81).

Father Lacroix’s discussion of classical literature and his scholarly endeavors attempt to situate real military turmoil within the safe confines of classical literature, where immortalized heroes are safely tucked away in black and white. Unfortunately, this distanced approach to real life leaves him sorely unable to deal with the reality of the crisis, without the strong tools of selfhood and real political savvy, and hands him right into the clutches of the Pinochet circle. When Allende kills himself, and Father Lacroix notes, “Peace at last” (82), he proves his inoperable knowledge and misreading of this political event while unconsciously prizing the upcoming dictatorship (by reading Allende’s death in a strictly personally positivistic way).

Although Father Lacroix acknowledges that “My country was not in a healthy state. . . . I must be a patriot” (79), he attempts to salve Chile’s wounds by colluding with the Pinochet coup. Mr. Raef and Mr. Etah, slimy members of the Pinochet regime, ask Father Lacroix, “Do you know anything about Marxism” (86), to which he replies: “A bit yes, but only out of intellectual curiosity. . . . I’m not the least bit sympathetic to the doctrine, ask anyone” (87). His response pinpoints all the nervous trepidation one would expect Father Lacroix to have, given his knowledge of a social theory that (in this regime) is dangerous enough to prove fatal. Father Lacroix is at least peripherally aware, via his nervousness, of the danger of his situation and is careful to contextualize his knowledge of Marxism within a distanced neutral rhetoric. This distancing suggests that Father Lacroix is likely to misappropriate Marxism and recreate it through enemy subjectivity. His intellectual backpedaling, whether out of fear or genuine ambivalence, suggests a weakened and flat intellect. This intellectual ambivalence allows the regime to reconstruct the brain, prioritizing that which fits into an operable ideology.

In fact, he calls upon the opaque “everyone” to attest to his guilt-free scholarship, in effect asking us (since we belong to this “everyone” group) to jump into the text and directly defend him. By asking for our involvement in the text, to save him from torture and death, Father Lacroix asks us to do for him what he can’t do for others. Bolaño asks us to participate in Father Lacroix’s internal struggle, emphasizing the dialectical, “what would you do” feeling. Bolaño, in this small elucidation of Father Lacroix’s intellectual weakness, allows us such close access to Father Lacroix’s consciousness that we see the “failure to help” as it happens and understand the subjective problems that lead to his inactivity. Father Lacroix’s weak intellectual stance relies upon an external other to allow him safe travel within this hegemony, an act that draws Bolaño’s audience into the collusive act about to take place.

When Father Lacroix finally meets the inner circle of the Pinochet

regime, we see his first act of resistance coupled with the same intellectual longing expressed in his initial moment of indoctrination with Farewell's crowd of critics. Father Lacroix notes, "From the corner of my eye I could see myself reflected in a mirror. The uniforms shimmered a moment like shiny cardboard cut-outs. . . . My black, loose-fitting cassock seemed to absorb the whole spectrum of colors in an instant" (91). In this small moment of fashion commentary, we see Father Lacroix drawn to the uniformity of their appearance, their collective identity, an identity he sorely lacks. Furthermore, the tools of this identity, the uniforms that demonstrate their presence within this powerful group, shimmer and shine in a way that admits Father Lacroix's priestly garb (he is ordained as an Opus Dei Priest earlier in the text—itsself an act of collusion). Father Lacroix's cassock absorbs the shine of the uniforms, thus placing this infiltration process within his own consent; his garments have to absorb Pinochet's uniform (not the other way around). Of course, we have to note here that this infiltration, although controlled by Father Lacroix's cassock, still locates his self-control in an external representation of himself. What I mean to note is that Father Lacroix doesn't understand that colluding with Pinochet could be internal; he is only able to understand this infiltration through the external, his clothes, and not through the internal, his mind. With the word "seemed," we see Father Lacroix's hesitation to allow for this external collusion, but he misses the internal and intellectual ramifications of collusion itself. By maintaining the external, Father Lacroix shifts guilt away from his internal intellectual failures by positioning the collusion as a benignly external act.

Lacroix begins to question the moral and ethical implications of his teaching experience and the value of Marxism itself. In this moment of doubt, Bolaño suggests that Marxism might be more than a "diabolical theory," perhaps "a kind of humanism" (95). This ability to resist intellectual writing used as political propaganda and resist the temptation to enter into a group dialogue that diminishes it is at the heart of the text. When Father Lacroix asks, "If I told my literary friends what I have done, would they approve?" (95), he's considering his actions (teaching Marxism to those already predisposed to considering it dangerously wrong) in terms of how he represented Marxism. What he's asking is whether or not he represented Marxism as a sphere of thought or as a faulty ideology. His existential crisis formulates his opposition to modeling Marxism as diabolical in favor of presenting it as humanism, or a way to prioritize the individual. Moreover, humanism in any facet directly opposes totalitarian regimes and their emphasis on uniformity and control, thus reasserting why Allende's government was such a dangerous force to the Pinochet regime; it allowed for internal identity formation and projection, versus external subjective filtering.

When Father Lacroix asks, “Would some condemn my actions out of hand? Would someone understand and forgive me? Is it always possible for a man to know what is good and what is bad?” (95), he asks his audience to determine his culpability. What Father Lacroix asks of us is this: what would we do if we were in his place? By presenting us with this stream-of-consciousness narrative (without paragraph breaks), Bolaño grants us entry into the internal workings of Father Lacroix’s mind, allowing us access to the thoughts that determine his complicity. When Father Lacroix addresses “someone,” in the aforementioned quotation, he’s addressing us, asking for our judgment.

If we empathize with Father Lacroix, are we colluding with the same philosophy that sought to control him? Are we capable of the same oversight and indiscretion as Father Lacroix when he teaches “enemy philosophy” to a cruel totalitarian regime? Father Lacroix’s breakdown, where he “began to cry helplessly,” suggests an acknowledgement of his guilt, a painful reminder that teaching communism could mean bringing more supposed “communists” to their torture and death. If we find ourselves unsure of his culpability, or find ourselves moved by this supposed moment of existential crisis, are we also prey to a totalitarian regime? Are the hegemonic forces and the ideology they perpetrate too strong for the individual to overcome?

By giving us Father Lacroix’s internal narrative and his epistemological incapability to resist the “patriotism” of the Pinochet regime, Bolaño invests his character with remarkably human qualities. In no way is Father Lacroix a strong, confident character; rather, he is a weak man, a failed poet, and a disillusioned priest. But Father Lacroix is any man forced to negotiate within a totalitarian regime, the true world universal Brennan notes. Father Lacroix’s failures point to the failures of humanity, thus illuminating for us the path Bolaño wants us to take: the path of resistance, both physically and intellectually. Without this path, we our thoughtless commodities, without individual intellect, purpose, or value.

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“In the altered light of the Sundarbans”: Understanding
Magical Realism in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*

Andrew Brusco

In her essay “Saleem Fathered by Oskar,” Patricia Merivale notes that “*Midnight’s Children* asks to be categorized as magic realism, if only because of its obvious and often-noted indebtedness to Garcia Marquez, the *fons et origo* of magic realism for the present generation” (329). In this formulation Merivale identifies Rushdie’s book with magical realism because of the similarities she uncovers between it and the genre’s putative “source and origin.” She is not the only literary critic who has used this formula to construct a canon of magical realist literature, and it is frequently the Columbian novelist Marquez and particularly his great *One Hundred Years of Solitude* that serve as the measure against which other novels and writers are held up.

But if we suspend for a moment our faith in definitions of magical realism that depend upon works already considered to represent the genre, we may find it more difficult to say what magical realism is, what it has been, where it comes from, and where it is going. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, editors of *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, made one of the first serious attempts to compile, in English, a diverse and comprehensive history of “magical realism” and that phrase’s usage in critical texts. Many of that book’s essays struggle to come up with definitive answers to these questions and often make statements about specific magical realist texts while presenting them as facts about magical realism itself. By way of example I would cite a passage from Faris’s own contribution to the collection, wherein she suggests that “magical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed” (163).

This definition, like others that I will not cite here, takes a descriptive approach to identifying the magically real. Inherent in this approach is an assumption of objectivity that implies that the phenomenon being described occurs naturally in the world and operates independently of human interference. Accordingly, literary essayists need only locate and observe already extant instances of magical realism in order to designate its characteristics as a genre. This task is made easier by the fact that we are already sure of where to look: if we want to see magical realism in its purest form, we know to go to Marquez, or Borges, or, failing that, some of Rushdie’s more adventurous work.

A potential problem with this critical tendency to *go to* magical realism,

to find and observe it where it lives, is that the vast majority of the authors associated with the genre write from regions of the world distant from the traditional seats of “Western Literature.” Magical realism, in other words, is easiest to find in the Third World; it lives, as Marquez, Borges, and Allende did, in rural South America and in the India of Rushdie’s youth. For Western critics, the assignation of the phrase “magical realism” to a work of twentieth-century fiction will almost certainly coincide with a visit to the marginal territories of the global community.

In considering this geographically involved criticism, Theo D’haen’s study “Magic Realism and Postmodernism” is instructive. D’haen assumes that “magic realism” refers most directly to a collection of distinct stories and novels. Since these predetermined representatives of the mode all happen to be written by authors outside of positions of power and since their authors all address senses of what it means to be subordinate to powerful structures, D’haen completes his syllogism with the claim that cultural and political eccentricity must be part of the definition of magical realism.

This is a critical mistake. Genres are human inventions designed to categorize and distinguish between the artifacts of our species. They are unlike natural phenomena occurring in the world around us and differ also from the artworks they are made to separate in that even those works, once published, are for the most part unchanging relics from a specific time and place. The limits and meanings of genre, however, are in a constant state of flux, as we will understand if we try to come to any consensus on whether the epic poem is still a living art form or on who was the first jazz musician. The method of observing and reporting on genres is not the only means by which genres can be known. Generic phrases like “magical realism” are tools put to use by critics of art and literature and function best when the critical community persists in debating ways of producing better, more precise applications of these tools.

One technique for stabilizing the defining qualities of the magically real is to trace the history of the phrase. The assertion that Marquez represents the “source and origin” of magic realism is undermined by the fact that the first appearance of that saying in print occurred two years before Marquez had been born: “Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism,” by Franz Roh, was published in Germany in 1925. Despite the fact that Roh’s essay is pointed at an understanding of visual art, it is valuable to this literary conversation for the moments when Roh defines magic realism in terms of a set of aesthetic qualities. Roh’s effort to elucidate the break with Expressionist painting that he observed in some of the art produced under the rule of the Weimar Republic moves beyond the mere observation of figures that appear in these works to an attempt to understand changes in the human process of producing art. Roh argued that it was not only the presence of unreality in a work of art that could

be magical, but the human capacity for representation. He complains that too much criticism “does not take account of the possibility of feeling existence, of making it stand out from the void; that a solidly modeled figure crystallizes itself, as if by a miracle, emerging from the most obscure source” (20). The phenomenon he sought to name has less to do with anything that appears in a work of art (and nothing to do with where the artist is from) than with the process by which a human can reproduce a vision of an external reality, what Roh called “*the interior figure of the exterior world*” (24, emphasis in original), in a way that is like the original but for the traces of human interpretive influence, intentionally suggested in minor details like a just-visible brushstroke. Magic realism is for Roh a process by means of which “the invention and reestablishment of the object can reveal to us the idea of creation” (24).

This “idea of creation,” built into the work of art as the signature and evidence of its artificiality, may be the most valuable contribution Roh makes to twentieth-century aesthetic theory. In his description of an artist working decisively within the mode for which he coined “magic realism,” Roh not only shows us what the term means to him, but also suggests means by which it may be extended to artworks dealing in language:

A painter like Schrimpf, who attempts to create the exterior world with the utmost precision, considers it very important not to paint outdoors, not to use a model, to have everything flow from the interior image to the canvas. That is why he paints his landscapes in his studio, almost always without a model or even a sketch. Nevertheless, he repeatedly insists that the landscape be definitively, rigorously, a *real* landscape that could be confused with an existing one. He wants it to be ‘real,’ to impress us as something ordinary and familiar and, nevertheless, to be magic by virtue of that isolation in the room: even the last little blade of grass can refer to the spirit. (25)

In this envisioning of the production of magic realism, the art is not magic, as some critics maintain, because of the possibility of fantastic images or events occurring within the piece, but rather by the formulation and materialization of the artistic vision itself. The magically real demands no unreality, no departure from what can possibly happen, but only the artist’s appreciation for his or her own skill for blurring the division between the real world in which artists and readers live and work and the infinite worlds of representation inspired by and derived from it.

In a series of lectures presented at Yale in the wake of the September 11th attacks, Salman Rushdie proposed what he called a “new thesis of the post-frontier” that pertains to just this sort of artificial division (*Step* 365). Offering a new interpretation of the imaginary lines that humans have drawn across

physical terrains as well as the landscapes of the mind, Rushdie argued that “this new, permeable post-frontier is the distinguishing feature of our times” (365). In their efforts to make definitive and lasting declarations about the meaning of magical realism, it is just this permeability that some critics have failed to perceive; no single text can embody the meaning of a genre, just as no single genre can wholly encompass any work of literary art. The work of Rushdie, in accordance with magical realism as Roh describes it, is at its best when it escorts his audience back and forth across these sorts of imaginary boundaries, blurring them and reducing them to the point of transparency.

I can find no better analogue for this movement in *Midnight's Children* than in Saleem's descent into and re-emergence from the mystical jungle of the Sundarbans. “The jungle closed behind them like a tomb” (459) is the phrase that marks the beginning of this chapter, establishing an enclosing boundary around Saleem and his companions. The jungle does not conform to the laws of the real, natural world, where Saleem tells us his journey had “begun far away” (462). Rather, “in the altered light of the Sundarbans” he is sensitive to “a quality of absurd fantasy” (462) not unlike that which has so frequently been associated with the magically real. *Fantasy* is what defines the Sundarbans, whether it be revealed through the presence of ghostly apparitions, spatial distortions, or auditory hallucinations, but the *magic* of the place comes as water:

They had untied their boat and leapt wildly into it when the wave came, and now they were at the mercy of the waters, which could have crushed them effortlessly against sundry or mangrove or nipa, but instead the tidal wave bore them down turbulent brown channels as the forest of their torment blurred past them like a great green wall, it seemed as if the jungle, having tired of its playthings, were ejecting them unceremoniously from its territory. (468)

The distinction between the magical and the fantastic in the Sundarbans lies in the fact that its borders are never closed, no matter how lost within them Saleem seems to be. What makes this chapter magically real is the way Rushdie draws a line between the real and the unreal, with the intention of allowing his characters to cross this line in both directions. In the same way, magically real literature can be said to gesture insistently toward the line between the reality that inspires art and the fantasy that grows out of it in an effort to make readers cognizant of their own crossing of this line, both into the world of myth and narrative and, when it is time to close the book, back out into the real.

I agree with Merivale that *Midnight's Children* represents late-twentieth century magical realism, but I base this less on “its multiplied fantasies (and)

its introductions of the supernatural into the everyday” (329) and more on Rushdie’s frequent allusions to the authorial process, which force us to cross the line between his worlds and our world over and over again. This is a novel that cannot help but remind readers at almost every turn that it is fiction. Rushdie draws us into his book with narrative flourishes and amazing plot events, but he also works to jar us out of the illusion his prose generates. He does so most obviously by creating, within his text, a parallel to the reader outside of it. I am referring of course to Padma, the in-text audience whose interruptions of Saleem’s life story serve the double function of mirroring the “real” reader’s experience moving through the tale and reminding that reader that no matter how alluring are the stories that Rushdie’s Saleem unwinds, they are always part of a highly mediated telling and always, as in Roh’s conception, the outward flow of the author’s interior imagining.

It is just this quality that occasionally annoys Padma. She expresses frustration, as might an impatient reader, with the self-directedness of Saleem’s narrative, as when she complains that “like an incompetent puppeteer, [he] reveals the hands holding the strings” (79). Despite the frequency of her interruptions, Saleem recognizes that as his narrative progresses, as it crosses Roh’s boundary between interior image and exterior projection, it becomes less and less his own, the property rather of his audience of one. Like the true magical realist, he cannot help but reveal his hands, as there is no clear partition between them and the show they produce. The fact that Padma, the recipient of the narrative, is also the source of the “kind of magic” (246) that keeps Saleem working, aptly demonstrates the beauty of the author/reader relationship as Rushdie envisions it. “It’s to those muscles,” he says of her physical presence, “that I’m telling my story . . . in autobiography, as in all literature, what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe” (343).

Rushdie’s new thesis – that permeable boundaries such as the one that appears to separate author from audience are a defining characteristic of the twenty-first century human experience – helps to explain why Roh’s definition of magic realism seems to me so much more satisfying, useful, and relevant than the ones proposed by Faris or D’haen. Unreal, fantastic, and incredible plot events have been used in fictions that predate Marquez by a significant margin, and not only by authors distant from the traditional seats of global political power. In order to distinguish the authentic contemporary artistic phenomenon that “magical realism” could denote from the fantasy offered by, say, the epics of Homer or the oddities of Poe, the critical community must maintain Roh’s conception of an art that endures in referring to itself as artificial. In this way, we can use our senses of the magic of literature to come to a more gracious understanding of what a “perforated sheet” might presently

symbolize for a diverse but highly integrated global community working to overcome outdated and imaginary lines drawn between the peoples and the worlds it contains.

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Flying toward Grace: Ambiguous Utopias and the
Ambivalence of Escapist Literature in Thomas Pynchon's
Against the Day

Jeffrey Canino

Opening with a fleet of airships from all corners of the Earth descending upon the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* is a novel markedly concerned with trans-cultural convergences. The microcosm of the World's Fair stands as a simultaneously glorious and cheap carnivalesque display of national borders breaking down in the wake of the approaching century's technological advancements. However, this newfound global community, as seen through only a cursory examination of the Fair, is mired in ambiguity: if the Fair itself is little more than prefabricated cultural chaos, what does this bode for the coming century's actual trans-cultural interactions? Our collective hindsight, reflecting back to the devastation of the First World War, serves to glumly answer this question. This perspective reminds us of the consequences inherent in the convergence of disparate nations and peoples with distinct self-interests. Such a realization serves as the novel's major thematic undercurrent. Regardless of benefits, mass global interactions almost certainly produce massive global conflict.

What is so very fascinating about Pynchon's novel is what it chooses to express this theme: turn-of-the-century literature. The novel enacts a re-examination of literary history that explodes the popular escapist literary forms of the nineteenth century's end. *Against the Day* seeks to reveal the naivety of dime novel narratives in light of the technological age, while simultaneously expressing a certain nostalgia for the optimism those stories privileged with regard to the as-of-then nonexistent global community. We see this nostalgia played out in the novel's adoption of the stylistic and narrative forms of the popular literature of the time; sections of the novel alternately resemble the western, the college romance, the science thriller and, most importantly for this discussion, the boy's adventure tale. The last of these appropriated genres provides us with our metafictional heroes, the Chums of Chance in their airship *Inconvenience*, who embark into exile on a supranational utopian project quite separate from global turmoil. Through the Chums, we bear witness to the novel's problematic prescription for something akin to "redemptive fiction," wherein the act of creating and reading fictions is denoted as a tool for historical reflection as well as a passage toward transcendence of earthly domination. We must then explore the ramifications of *Against the Day's* ambiguous evaluation of fiction's allure: does the novel discover redemption in

literature or does it suffers a backwards slide into escapism? This paper will argue that by establishing a clear divide between the realities of fiction and the historical world, *Against the Day* celebrates the novelistic form as the ideal space for critique and the exploration of alternative realities.

This discussion, like the novel itself, must begin at the Chicago World's Fair. The novel initially describes the Fair as an autonomous "city-within-a-city" (24) and later like "some living collective creature" (52). The novel isolates the Fair from the rest of society, in a space effectively divorced from reality. The Fair itself is an unwieldy conglomeration of nations, bursting with displays of the cultural practices and artifacts of exotic locales, all crammed together in close proximity. The effect produced by this vision of the Fair is not unlike that of a carnival or a circus, national representatives barking at onlookers to sample "exotic smoking practices from around the world," which, they assure us, are "of great anthropological value" (23). The novel elaborates on the Fair's carnival atmosphere:

A Zulu theatrical company re-enacted the massacre of British troops at Isandhlwana. Pygmies sang Christian hymns in the Pygmy dialect. Jewish klezmer ensembles filled the night with unearthly clarinet solos. Brazilian Indians allowed themselves to be swallowed by giant anacondas, only to climb back out again, undigested and apparently with no discomfort to the snake. Indian swamis levitated, Chinese boxers fainted, kicked, and threw one another to and fro. (22)

The impression that the sights, sounds, and smells of the Fair impart is one of artificiality. After being beckoned by Tungus reindeer herders and a pair of gyrating young women to attend what's called a "Special Reindeer Show" and "see what really goes on during long winter nights," one of the Chums of Chance, browsing the Fair's attractions, reflects, "This doesn't seem . . . quite . . . authentic, somehow" (23, second ellipsis in the original). The illusion of multi-cultural stability presented by the Fair is upheld, albeit shakily, simply because what is being offered is little more than a shameless tourist attraction, undemonstrative of what actual global integration would look like. It is a late-nineteenth-century version of Disney's Epcot—a simulacrum of the isolated and integrated globe, leaving out all the icky conflict. However, being populated by actual denizens of these alien cultures, the Fair's illusion of a harmonious world does have a few cracks: "Observers of the Fair had remarked how, as one moved up and down its Midway, the more European, civilized, and . . . well frankly *white* exhibits located closer to the center of the "White City" seemed to be, whereas the farther from that alabaster Metropolis one ventured, the more evident grew the signs of cultural darkness and savagery" (22, ellipsis in the original). With this we see that a cultural hierarchy is

rampant in the ideal that the Fair represents. The Chicago World's Fair, though an international event, is located in an American city, operated by American interests, and visited primarily by American tourists. Accordingly, the Fair exploits participating foreign nations economically, but without acceptance and only in so far as their cultures provide curious and reassuring contrast to civilized Whiteness.

The promise of the Fair is bunk not only with regard to its vision of the global community, but also in its formulation of how that harmonious world is to be created: through technological advancement. The Fair, as the novel sees it, displays culture and science in equal measure, as if the futures of both are intertwined, those same Midway carnival barkers urging attendees to examine a "scientific exhibit" showcasing the "latest improvements to the hypodermic syringe and its many uses" right alongside the world's exotic smoking practices (23). Critics have commented upon *Against the Day's* status as a jubilant turn-of-the-century science fiction novel through its latching onto the glimmers of scientific advancement introduced at places like the World's Fair, where technology and benign human progress are imagined as being virtually limitless. We see this most clearly in the wistful science of Nikola Tesla, who exhibits at the Fair and remains a strong force in the text's periphery. Tesla is working on creating "a 'World-System,' for producing huge amounts of electrical power that anyone can tap for free, anywhere in the world" (33). The World-System is exactly the type of democratizing technology that supports a communal vision of global prosperity. However, it is for that reason that the World-System is not a viable technology: simply, the novel's world does not function as the utopia that the World-System presupposes and necessitates. The character Scarsdale Vibe, an assiduous capitalist, sees Tesla's World-System as "the end of the world, not just 'as we know it' but as anyone knows it" and calls the device "a weapon . . . designed to destroy not armies or materiel, but the very nature of exchange, our Economy's long struggle to evolve up out of the fish-market anarchy of all battling all to the rational systems of control whose blessings we enjoy at present" (34). Vibe highlights for us the competing World-Narrative running in opposition to that of the Fair's: a global community of economic exploitation and control, and, failing that, conflict. A short decade and a few hundred pages later, the novel's world is embroiled in World War I, the global community inhabiting a "great planetary killing-floor," not the Fair's microcosmic utopia gone macro (443-44). The Fair was a pleasing narrative, allowing those who visited to escape from their historical reality and venture into an uncharted, wildly optimistic future. As one character explains it to the Chums of Chance, well into the novel, "you [were] such simpletons at the Fair, gawking at your Wonders of Science, expecting as your entitlement all the Blessings of Progress, it is your faith, your pathetic balloon-

boy faith” (555). Later, after the Fair’s brief summer of operation, when we see its structural grandeur reduced to burning rubble and inhabited by only the homeless and stray animals, we fully grasp the instability of the world-vision the organizers of the Fair wished to promote. We understand the fiction of the premise and promise the Fair offered of a united world.

The novel’s other great fictions, *The Chums of Chance*, stand as a curious counter-point to the Fair. The Chums, a group of five boy aeronauts and their hyper-intelligent canine companion Pugnax, fly across the globe—and the novel—in their airship, the *Inconvenience*, sent to ever-more exotic nations on top-secret adventures. It is one such adventure that brings them to Chicago that summer, to attend “the great international gathering of aeronauts being held in conjunction with the World’s Fair” (11). The wildly optimistic, fictional pretense of the Fair ends up being a perfect fit for the Chums: “The Chums of Chance could have been granted no more appropriate form of “ground-leave” than the Chicago Fair, as the great national celebration possessed the exact degree of fictitiousness to permit the boys access and agency. The harsh nonfictional world waited outside the White City’s limits, held off for this brief summer” (37). The Chums themselves are semi-fictional, or at least assuredly metafictional, characters. While existing and interacting in the *Against the Day*’s diegetic world, they simultaneously inhabit that world as the popular protagonists of a series of boy’s adventure novels. The line between the boy’s diegetic fictitiousness and reality blurs constantly, the narrator of the Chums’ sections even occasionally switching into the first person to address “my young readers” and provide a catalogue of titles to their dime novel adventures, including *The Chums of Chance at Krakatoa* and *The Chums of Chance Search for Atlantis* (6). The leader of the Chums, being asked outright whether or not they are storybook characters, replies, “No more than Wyatt Earp or Nellie Bly” (37), only to later refer to their “colleague, Brother Tom Swift” (794), the protagonist of Victor Appleton’s long-running scientific juvenile adventure series from our reality. Fittingly, the sections of *Against the Day* dedicated to the Chums feature the formalistic levity of a boy’s adventure tale, replete with tomfoolery and the fantastic. At one juncture, the Chums navigate a planetary shortcut from one pole of the Earth to the other, encountering a race of hostile gnomes along the way (for more information on that excursion, Pynchon informs us, consult *The Chums of Chance in the Bowels of the Earth*) (117).

The Chums, like the World’s Fair, are divorced from “the harsh non-fictional world,” as Pynchon labels it, and dwell in the realm of fiction, the Fair in essence and the Chums literally so. In his use of the boy’s adventure tale throughout the novel, Pynchon is able to chart the disintegration of the Chums’ youthful optimism and their rather complete political ignorance. The

Chums, early on maintaining a Directive of “Noninterference” with those on the ground, are oblivious to the potential consequences of reckless globe-trotting or the metaphorical shrinking of the planet that their adventures represent. Pynchon notes that this cultural ignorance, typified by the boy’s adventure tale, would breed contempt in a nonfictional scenario: as the Chums walk through the Fair, “Here in the shadows, the faces moving by smiled, grimaced, or stared directly at [the Chums] . . . as if in the boys’ long career of adventures in exotic corners of the world there had been accumulating, unknown to them, a reserve of mistranslation, offense taken” (22). This “harsh nonfictional reality,” full of contempt for the Chum’s willful naivety, breaks through incrementally. As the historical global community comes to fruition within the novel, and conflicts begin to arise, the Chums become increasingly disaffected from the diegetic world and their appearances in it become far less frequent. One character comments to them, “You boys spend too much time up there. You lose sight of what is really going on in the world you think you understand” (553). Late in the novel, with World War I raging across Europe, the Chums are told by another that the current World Situation has complicated lives on the ground, to which the Chums respond, “World situation?” (1022). The fictional realm of the nineteenth-century globe-trotting, escapist adventure tale was not a model prepared for, or even capable of fathoming the twentieth century’s global upheavals and as a result vanished as a popular form, being replaced by new conceptions that dealt openly with social and trans-cultural issues.

And yet, the Chums do not disappear from *Against the Day*. In fact, the novel ends by featuring them in a brief passage that presents a fascinating counterpoint to that prospect of the autonomous, fictional city presented by the World’s Fair. Continuing the novel’s trend of doubling, as the novel begins with a failed utopia, so it ends with another, although in this case presenting us with a vision of the novel as successful utopian space. In these final pages, the Chums transform their airship into an entire floating city, able to soar above and apart from the historical world. One character relates that the Chums now view the *Inconvenience*-as-city as being representative of “the supranational idea . . . literally to transcend the old political space, the map-space of two dimensions, by climbing into the third” (1083). This third dimension, in this formulation, is a heterogeneous community willfully divorced from global concerns, a blissfully ignorant aeronaut paradise. The passage compresses time as each of the Chums has been married off to members of a group of jetpack-wearing female Aethernauts and begun to have children. We sense the population by this point is quite large, as Pynchon writes, “The ship by now has grown as large as a small city. There are neighborhoods, there are parks. There are slum conditions. . . . Never sleeping, clamorous as a nonstop feast

day, *Inconvenience*, once a vehicle of sky-pilgrimage, has transformed into its own destination, where any wish that can be made is at least addressed, if not always granted” (1084-85). Realizing Tesla’s vision of the World-System, the *Inconvenience* has her engineering updated to run on the power of light itself, and in this advancement we see a redemption of the Fair’s technological promise, which has previously failed to come to fruition. The novel here ends with the intimation that the Chums’ Supranational Utopia is flying towards a state of grace and complete transcendence of the oppressive historical world.

However, The Chums’ transcendence brings us to a set of complications. In line with Pynchon’s counter-cultural leanings, the *Inconvenience* becomes a utopia only through its “soaring free from enfoldment by the indicative world below,” which, consequently, forces the Chums to pay “with a waiver of allegiance to it and all that would occur down on the Surface” (1023). The novel’s global themes here culminate in an ambiguous note: the only way to transcend the harsh, historical realities of global intercourse is to escape into an isolated, impenetrable community, which in *Against the Day*, as expressed through the fabricated Chums of Chance, resides entirely in the realm of fiction. Much as the airship *Inconvenience* becomes an expansive fictional utopia, so does *Against the Day*. Here the novel seems to posit that fiction is the only thing that can release us from the recognizable dimensions. But it is not the imposing fictions like the World’s Fair—those that bark at us to accept them—or those naïve adventure tales that *Against the Day* deems transcendent, but instead those that we actively seek to accept and enfold ourselves in, like a big book. For one to read to the end of *Against the Day*’s fiction, one must be committed to the vision it presents. That vision, however one wishes to take it, is one that deviates strongly from reality. In fact, although it takes place in the period of time directly before the events of Pynchon’s own *Gravity’s Rainbow*, one leaves *Against the Day* with the feeling that the novel’s world will not culminate in the earlier novel’s parabolic detonations.

Regardless, this formulation of a transcendent escape into fiction is initially troubling. *Against the Day* has already deflated the relevancy of escapist literary forms, so how can it possibly now advocate for them? Perhaps what is being advocated is not escapist literature, but a form of redemptive fiction. In the novel’s opening pages, one of the Chums states that the World’s Fair may be a hub for “the inexorably rising tide of World Anarchism” and that with any luck they will only be exposed to such from “safely within the fictional leaves of some book” (6). What *Against the Day* produces is a tangible, encyclopedic critique of a very specific time in world history. It shows us the horrors, safely and at a distance, and tells us what we already know: that the historical reality is not desirable. Near the novel’s end, the Chums float dangerously between their safe fictional world and a place they call Counter-Earth, displaying “an

American Republic . . . passed so irrevocably into the control of the evil and moronic” (1021), which is almost certainly our own. *Against the Day* does not seek to avoid the present and the future, but to reflect upon, revise, and redeem the past. It reminds us that fiction can reach beyond international concerns and realities, transcend them even, but never ignore them. Miles Blundell, the Chums’ resident mystic and handyman, has a vision of those young, naïve souls who jumped into World War I that is worth quoting in full:

They knew they were standing before a great chasm none could see to the bottom of. But they launched themselves into it anyway. Cheering and laughing. It was their own grand ‘Adventure.’ They were juvenile heroes of a World-Narrative—unreflective and free, they went on hurling themselves into those depths by tens of thousands until one day they awoke, those who were still alive, and instead of finding themselves posed nobly against some dramatic moral geography, they were down cringing in a mud trench swarming with rats and smelling of shit and death. (1023-24)

Against the Day, in its ever-reflective, metafictional mission, exposes that juvenile World-Narrative for what it was and reveals the terrible consequences it wrought. The novel’s metafictional lens separates the realities of fiction from those of our historical reality, noting that while they may relate, they do not correlate—a fact which those who enfolded themselves into the narratives of World War I or the World’s Fair regrettably learned only afterward. In this way, *Inconvenience* and the Chums become a metaphor for the novel as a whole, as when early in the book World’s Fair attendees “[cast] apprehensive looks upward at the enormous gasbag of the descending *Inconvenience*, quite as if it were some giant eyeball . . . ever scrutinizing from above, in a spirit of constructive censure” (13). The novel, like *Inconvenience*, assumes the role of constructive critic. Reflecting on the historical past and debunking its phony narratives, it allows us to see, by way of its jubilant fairy-tale ending, that perhaps fiction is the only place where we can create better worlds.

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IV Poetry

Hommages, Variations, Resonances

H. R. Stoneback

All poems, it is often said, are responses to other poems. The only thing suspect in such an assertion is the word *all*; yet surely *many* poems are responses, direct or indirect, to other poems. The responsory nature of poetry may be understood in many ways, including open homage to another poem or poet, variations played on other poems, and resonances more or less deliberate. The latter may first be defined in terms of acoustics as the intensification or prolongation of a musical tone produced by sympathetic vibration, but, in poetry, it must also be understood as *thematic* resonance. The easiest thing for the reader to identify is the poem of *homage* that carries a dedication to a specific writer or poem. This is not to say that the salute thereby stated is a simple matter—it may be profound or playful or ironic, or all three simultaneously. As for variation and resonance, given the subtle art and careful craft of poetry, these matters may be more difficult for readers to delineate.

Whether we comprehend the word-deeds of homage, variation, and resonance in terms of a more or less Bloomian anxiety of influence or the High Modernist strategies of allusion, it is the reader's task to come to terms with the nature of the poet's response. It will not suffice for the reader to feel or say "the dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did," as T. S. Eliot famously put it in "Tradition and the Individual Talent"—we must respond, with Eliot, "Precisely, and they are that which we know." The measure of what we get from a poem is the measure of what we bring to it.

The reader, then, might ask of poems in the following Section One: why is Cædmon in the title of this poem and why does that poem carry the marker "After Frost"? To be sure, poems may be written when the poet is only vaguely aware or not at all aware consciously of poets or poems that lurk behind the poem. Regarding a poem here that carries a dedication to Baudelaire, the poet observes: "Long after the poem was written, I realized that Baudelaire was a ghostly presence behind the poem. First, because when I have lived on the Île Saint-Louis, Baudelaire accompanied me on my daily walks around the island. And then I saw certain resonances and echoes that were not intentional in the sense of any deliberate Baudelairean design."

The Call for Poems for this issue invited poems of *homage* and response to other poets and poems. We include in the first poetry section only those

poems that indicate such response in title, epigraph, or dedication. This does not mean that readers may not discern a variety of echoes in the non-dedicatory poems that follow in the second section.

Section One

Manon of the Sun Spot

*It didn't matter that my poems were about springs
And cats don't like water.*

—H. R. Stoneback, “On Paintings and Cats”

Jessica Mackenzie Conti

She bathes in window light
 Manon of the sun spot
 With her harmonic voice
She has abandoned her spring
 Her faucet dripping
 Her porcelain tub with leak
Shepherdess of nothing but her own hair
 Gathering in wisps on sandy carpet
 Cleaning legs and face and body
She seeks no revenge on Evil
 The life force flow is not stopped
 Her father is long dead
And her brother sleeps in blankets
 Manon of the faucet leaking
 Manon of the sun spot
Flowers bloom in winter
For Manon's eternal spring

Despair

To Whitman, Pound, Faulkner

Dennis Doherty

Another way to say the old thing.
Another winter's filthy wrack.
Remember next summer.
Another hornworm hidden beneath
the wrecked leaf life.
Another leaf, a new one,
a never one now.

The same leaf each season
bursting, popping, sneaking
for the same worm, the same I
and my fingers to take, give,
here and here, my ears to hear
and always it's almost.
The soul leans towards something like yes.

The mouth translates only to green.
The leaves, these tongues, say "awe," or "all,"
every time and each to each,
so close they pulse like blood or stars.
The hour my ears can learn to speak
I'll ride the day from west to east.
A lady will cull the city's waste
and dust will cure us of our haste.

Have you forsaken me?

Intersect

After Frost

Dennis Doherty

A child gambols alone to school (among, apart from groupings of others along the same trek from diverse dwellings and grades, shifting not like geese in line but clouds blurred to comely shape versus points of arrival, departure) unthreatened and curious in his intimate world of crossing guards and car exhaust, noting distance between his eyes and the root warped upheavings of bluestone sidewalk slabs before the structures leaning against each other's years—fading wooden shack of a mad axe murderer born in the last century on his plot of dirt between the smart apartment building with the angry super and, sigh, the neatly appointed modern ranch's gardener, the thin geometrical new Catholic church darting saintly downhill to the domed elementary school's lacquered slick floors—Road Runner meets Elmer Fudd—and time's sirens along the way—soda shop and candy store, Rexall's with its toy soldiers and baseball cards, basement delis under tudor facades with penny red pistachio machines spitting nutdrops before Mcdermott's ice cream in the spring.

In time he will meet a lost baby squirrel he can't keep, wayward beetles, kitten toes, dogs, toads, a frog, the ordure of stink bugs, the sticky lips of maple keys, and spit, taste of blood, kiss on his sneakered arches everyday of the root ragged oaken mound of brown powdered dirt that choirs the buoy

from his home like a lantern, replayed ache
on treads of the grand, messy, great unplanned.

The classroom's a station; lesson's en route
to farther demarcations; his mojo
is the steps he brings, now, to darkened rooms
of dreams and sleep and sex, to women: lures:
fought a bully once on a dead end street,
and it made him seek the maritime, there,
craze of facet waves, mirror magic of
the ways we slap together secret in
what we bring, time's particulars and space
a whisper, eternal heart knot. Women
who grew the child broke his future. Women
who used the man broke his icons. Women
who knew the teacher taught him hell. Daughters
who broke his tears revealed all. Grief is love.

A Name for Something That Was Gone

For Elizabeth Madox Roberts

Matthew Nickel

I.

It is another name for a knife with a long blade
Lean-to edged toward ground, another name
For campsite, horses drifting toward water
Salt-lick gathers the wild to innocence,
Toward naiveté, the night is a noise that sings
A lonely psalm, loneliness is a hymn of the hunter

I watched them as night expired in the un-named
Hour at the half-forgotten spring by some deer-run
The names all run together, Boone, Halloway, Harrod
Crockett, Walden, Mansker, Bledsoe, Drake, Smith
Every one claimed a smith in the family, way back
When the campsite became a cross roads

And the name of the cross became the name of
A settlement and a fort with logs and people
Fought the wilderness and died fighting and
Forgot dreams had beside a fireplace somewhere
In lowlands before the end of the world captured
The boot-heel in mud at threshold. Then a glint

Of steel blade flashed the last flame before night,
Wheeled the stars toward horizon, seasons rolled
And the names of people became names of places
On maps with jagged edges marking counties
Names echoing the wild hollow of the Gap.
Who can pronounce the name of eternity—

II.

Alone I stare bewildered at a roadside plaque
Trying to recall who it was in town told me to stop
At this place, the oblivion of a road marker naming
But not telling the story of blood flowing the creek
At Crawford's Spring, a red morning—nothing

Except the quiet road winding down toward Perryville
The familiar turn toward Springfield, the bridge, the hill,
The graveyard, and way off those other hills—where
A little girl, nameless, chases the morning sun, telling her
Father, over and over, “someday Daddy I’ll name those
Men and their women who came here long ago,
Someday, Daddy, I’ll be a writer.”

Endurance

For HRS after Ezra Pound, "In Durance"

Matthew Nickel

I am homesick after mine own kind
Flesh-shrouded an open hand sweeps
The ancient pews of Rocamadour

I am homesick after the hard stone kneeling,
Miraculous bell unmoving, the arched ways
Forming a wooden angularity, the Black Madonna,

A sunken tomb for Saint Amadour, the Lover
Of devotion, oh lovely Veronica, wipe our tears away,
Loving wife of Zacchaeus, pray for us;

We feast in the village, there is food de campagne,
Life-sized country bread, clean wine from Cahors
And the girls smile as we kneel by

In places Roland walked, where his sword Durendal
Scraped stone, the Oliphaunt sounding the Alzou Canyon
Upward like prayer, Charlemagne's hand holds reins high

Rides by the wheeled chair, we stare, following
Suddenly you have a white-bearded look,
Utterly unable to resign yourself

To the modern world, homesick
After your own kind, the voices of spirit-shrouded
Angels singing high, ahead, Carolus Magnus lifts

A hand holding broken shards from the True Cross
Gestures toward the Virgin, the Christ child
Stone-silent in the cool fertile *grotte* of the chapel

Charlemagne descends the horse, you rise from wheelchair
Lay a hand to the Emperor's shoulder, walk up stairs
Into the chapel touching holy water, candles on the altar—

Waiting outside with Roland in blue sky shift, I reach

To take the horn from him for one last hoisted hosanna,
For we are homesick after our own kind.

Scott Schneider

—Mr. Bones: You been quiet long too long, frien';
 ain't no point un-budgin' now: gimme yo' han'.
 Put yo' crotch back on.
 C'mon ol' pussycat, world too scary
 wifoutchu!

—Henry: I can't come out and play,
 not today anyway.

The kids are starved and bombs are falling
 all around; the ax won't hack, mac. Call me
 what you will, Bones.
 World is too scary and that fall Hé took
 Was a loo-loo. 'sides, talking doesn't help.
 It only hurts.

—Sir Bones: That banker's son was a los' one,
 no clue, no sense, all sad-like and dé-pressed:
 you isn't him.
 He mess too much wif thinkin'. Wives, dad, booze
 Done conked him; what'd he lose?

Henry: me.

—Sir Bones: Nahtchyet.

Scott Schneider

The background blurs; the birches merge with light
As if to show us heaven waits beyond
The forest's edge. The sun is smoke and ash.
Our eyes descend the trunks of darkened trees;
The men, in conference, huddle in the rear
Away from wives, away from children's eyes,
To talk—of what? Of thirst? Of babies licking grass?
We cannot see the men, their faces turned
Away, obscured by distance. Women move
Within the foreground; two tall women frame
The rest, as forest frames them all. They both
Wear Stars of David. Both are mothers. Both
Now, are dead. At their feet are others,
Mothers, babies, those who thought the trip was
Done—the shower would expunge their grime.
Blonde hair upon her head,
a child with gumdrop eyes
Halts us.
We see no star on her.
Her hands
Are cupped together.
She asks a question with no words.
We cannot answer her.
For us, our lives have stopped;
the time (we know as time) has ceased to tick,
at least for now—
that is, until we're called to put her down.
We cannot enter there; nor can she come to us—
We must become less aware now, as she
Blends into the blackness of waistcoats,
Into the still life, the faces disposed
About randomly, their dirty cheeks and
Hands like softened fruit heaped in rusty bunches
On some dim canvas in an attic.

Cædmon in New Paltz

James Sherwood

The winter wind whips across the still Wallkill
miles of rippling quicksilver mirror, mercurygray reflecting
the birch branches timorous quiver, trembling blasted bones
beyond, the fields' furrows filled in, harden as
they are claimed by cold—you can count the stones
forced up by ice-fingers; frost-thrust
hands reap a hardscrabble harvest.

Bodaciously Survigrou

*After reading an Elizabeth Madox Roberts manuscript note
in the Library of Congress*

H. R. Stoneback

“Yonder girl is right bigly thinks me,” he said.
Her blonde hair whirled in thick survigrou wind.
“Yessir, that-un’s bodaciously survigrou
and her just a tyke three months big with child.”

He was my work-comrade, drove the big truck.
We delivered heavy things for Sears Roebuck.
She was a pregnant girl we passed on some forlorn
shack-porch in the Knobs, all blonde and tumbledown

her long stringy fifteen-year-old locks caught
in a sudden gust of wind as we carried a stove
inside the shack next door. The day suddenly blazed
bodily bold, audacious, named in words fraught

with the earth’s incarnate lusciousness
held by ancient words new to me—surreal, *le mot juste*,
surabondant, *survigoureuse*, bodaciously survigrou.

Old Man on Footbridge behind Notre-Dame

For Baudelaire always there

H. R. Stoneback

On the footbridge behind Notre-Dame,
the crossing to the Île Saint-Louis,
I stopped several nights on the way home
to listen to Stefan the *accordéoniste*

play his tunes above the Seine. He played old
folksongs as well as Mozart, Dvorak,
Smetana. They said he was the last of the real old *Par-ee*,
the last *bal musette* man—his accordion made the river rock.

The first night I put a large tip in his case
and he tried to refuse, saying it was too much.
But I explained I started life as a streetsinger
and all troubadours owed this to each

other. The second night the crowd was thin
so we talked about life and our memories
of making music in the streets. *Without song*,
he said, *memory is a form of suffering*.

*I can go days without food but not without
song. Only music fathoms the sky.
Song makes everything allegory.*

We talked late. When he left I walked the long

slow way home around the island. I paused
to admire, as always, the shimmering
bateau-mouche leaf-light on façades of old mansions,
and the downspouts of the Hôtel Lauzun.

All week, after the lectures and poetry readings,
the concerts and museums, the daily fleeting
joys, I stopped to listen to Stefan and he became
in my mind the Old Music Man on the Bridge.

The last night, as I was thinking we could fix
the financial crisis if they sold Greece

to China, and maybe they could make
Plato or Aristotle-Land, a vast theme park,
and share the profits, Stefan started doing Piaf.
The crowd, rapt, intense, sang along low, soft.
I sat next to Stefan, facing the circle,
watching the faces, lips, of young Parisians
and tourists to see if they knew the sacred words.
Some did. We sang the Piaf repertoire
that lent itself to *bal musette* accordion,
beginning with *L'Accordéoniste*
including Stefan's patter about the end
of everything, the end of music
when the Germans took Paris. He introduced
me to the crowd as a famous writer who had once
been a legendary streetsinger—that's what *he* said—
and asked me to sing one. He said some of the Piaf
songs I named were not right for his accordion,
but he held the chords low as I sang, *doucement*,
“*Non, je ne regrette rien*”—then he fired up
his instrument, looking in my eyes,
shouting “*CHANTEZ, Chantez!*” so I belted
it out: *Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be . . .*

Everyone crossing the bridge to the heart of Paris
stopped and many joined in as Stefan played
and I sang loud, over and over:
Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be

The future's not ours to see, que sera sera.
My friend, the blonde from Berlin who came to visit me,
leaned against the bridge-railing looking like
a blonde from Berlin. But she did not sing

though the crowd sang along in several languages:
*When I was just a little boy I asked my mother
what will I be* and Stefan's accordion
made the Seine rise up and we all soared

above Notre-Dame. The song lasted ten
minutes and a lifetime: *Que Sera Sera!*
After the shower of coins and bills filled his case
and the crowd departed, late, quiet on the bridge,

he said *let's do one more just for us.*

When I said "Lili Marlene," he said *they—*
gesturing with his eyes toward the world's most
elegant homes and apartments—*they do not like*

German songs. We talked about Marlene Dietrich,
Hero of the French Resistance, but he said
they would throw him off the bridge if he played
a German song. (This, in October 2011!)

Still, on the deserted bridge after midnight-
quitting-time, he played it, in a susurrant
whisper over the river and I sang it like a secret.
The blonde sang nothing. Then the Old Man

of the Bridge filled his pockets with the Euros
from his case and packed up his accordion.
He said: *This is the best night I've had in years.
This is more money than I made all summer.*

He smiled at me, we embraced, he said:

*I guess an old writer in a wheelchair
with a Santa Claus face and beard, a wise old voice
bigger than Father Christmas, is good for commerce.*

We thanked each other, shook hands goodnight. I watched
him walk away toward whatever *Rive Gauche*

hovel he called home. Then I realized
he was probably ten years *younger* than me.

But as long as the song endured
we were both still twelve years old.
So I rolled toward home, my elegant apartment
on the Île Saint-Louis, with my friend

the unsingingly world-weary blonde
from Berlin, jaded and melancholy
in her 20s, and she wasn't really there.
I saw she was never anywhere. And I didn't care.

A young local boy came up from the Seine
offered us a fish he'd just caught. She shuddered.
I smiled and thought of boys on the bridge in *Par-ee*
and sang to the river *whatever will be, will be . . .*

Section Two

Eyeless on the Walkill

Marc Cioffi

Life, and the Gentleness that consumed it
mingle in the unbound beauty
of a dead body in the Shawangunk fen.
Composed beneath the trees in their fullness
she is a secret best kept unsaid,
spoken only in the language of pines
and the holy hush of Wallkill floods.

Gentle Thief,
you smell of worms and driftwood
in the backwash of this shallow mire.
Wrinkled and wet as a fetus,
she breeds your wealth of slow decay:
fumes for my strangled pining.
A vision of mastery in a hand mine can't unfold.

You hoard the sky
a setting sun leaves over this cold stream's clarity.
The rippled currents of a wanderer's heart
and cautious notes of music float away,
across the river in fear of approaching voices—
I must let you go in the pale remains
of day and our unbound contentment.

Of the Quiet Couple Dining

Marc Cioffi

Another table of the dining dead
whose silence every waiter hates to serve,
reminding each of the stillness love will come
to be. Their noiseless repetition breathes
as they sit content and, faintly smiling up
at ceiling fans, keep their hands controlled.
One feels their silence swell before it's asked
to hear their meal. Economy of repose—what trauma
contends in quiet? Their muteness is a mastered force,
which in the hands of frantic men destroys
vocation. It's true that all the birds had flown
before the flood began. And God, in silence, spoke
to man in language lost when utterance rose, proposing,
in the calm before a spectacle, incentive to create.

Parental Control

Robert Cutrera

Just for a moment the two stood stock still,
Outlandish as a spinning copper coin,
Hanging onto their punishment; they joined,
Noting that their kind would soon be fulfilled:
Man with his nature below, which harps on
Illumination and degradation.
Languid, the rest followed, their thoughts undone;
Together seeking a resolution.
Oh, we have feared far too long in their wake:
Now to survive, their sin we forsake.

Two-Step

Joann K. Dejudicibus

Today your legs gave way
under the weight of a second child
like trunks of soft oak
turned frail from bed rest.

Mothers need spider legs to bear diaper bags,
bottles, laundry baskets, bills,
and the heft of husbands who sleep too soundly,
who have no memory of teething.

If I could give you my legs you once called slender,
the ones my mother called chicken legs:
thin, webbed with blue veins, birthmark-splattered—
the ones you taught to dance—then I would.

You knew the steps, learned them
quickly as I stumbled through,
breaking in my new western boots.
I cannot two-step with anyone but you.

In your hospital dress, your belly rose up
with daughter, hiding the bee-sting-hot
skin of your left leg under thin, pilled sheets:
a calf-lodged clot hiked to upper thigh.

Your sitting upright, walking,
even washing deserved ovation.
Morphine shot up into your throat;
Percocet drowned consciousness.

The child arrived as healthy as a large white egg.
Her legs unfolded as a foal's do.
She called on a Monday and you answered her,
opening like a blossom.

Where words collapse, legs like tendrils climb.
They know the way back to light.

Birthmark

Joann K. Dejudicibus

We talk of cleaning the rugs, under
the rugs, and suddenly
I enter into another childhood

like the cat I dropped off in the town
where I was born
one hour from home.

I have found my way here.
I know the face of the strange woman
who gave birth to me in St. Anthony's.

I don't know this blue house
but remember our eyes, their right angles,
each a tidy room with torn-screen centers:

and her dyed blonde hair
curling tightly like a daughter's fist
about her mother's finger.

Warning, a Sign of the Times

Sarah Hurd

You were warned—
On broken phones with fuzzy reception
In person and without exception
You were warned—

You were warned of honeybees on the rise
With uncertainty in toxic skies
That you could from some gray beyond
Fly to places no soul had gone
And preach as if the clouds were wrong
To cast you out—some warning from God—
A herald from the great divide
A revelation from the Old and Wise—

A wind-chime writhes in its malaise
Forecasting more uncertain days
An unusual sinfully sullen refrain
Past lemon trees and old city stays
Where rules anesthetized in heads
That nothing unless something *meant*,
Passed days of nothing—and the stars—

Yes, they were warned, as children are
With humble throbbing blissful hearts
And scuffed shoes and bloodied knees,
Holes poking at the seams
Of dirty jeans—and scars
That grow to last a lifetime

A note to end the rhyme

And yet we once were told
“It’s a riot to grow old”
With fraying trousers and sad array
To mask the infantile cliché—

And yet, you have the words to say to me
“We’re lost within some distant sea
With sirens sweetly beckoning”
To some colossal burning dream . . .

And interest fading in the wind
This moment, then, cannot begin—
With time insisting it’s lazy beat
Those order we simply cannot meet
Like insects crawling in mildewed streets

Stuck to yellowing windowpanes—

You asked me once to stay the same—
But empty promises don’t promise more
For you I remember you were warned.

Mermanity

David J. Hurst

Who held the baby by the hand?
Who followed little toed indents along the sand?
Who guarded gullies and the Atlantic Sea
Beyond the tiny heeled impressions?
Neptune's waves pulled by Phoebe
Until peaked spawning children
Angry at those whom dwell on land
Singing their attention to death
Followed by laughter then song
Singing until crashing out of breath
A long soothing blow to woe
With a recollection of the child
Summoned they go

Sensus Communis

David J. Hurst

The ineffable painted across the page
In symbols seemingly comprehensible
Fictitiously flowing to a point
Precepts seemingly subjective
Merging with the universal
Subliminally sublime for a moment
Objectively comprehending the one
The us universal
Even if only momentarily
Complicating the me
Internally indefinitely

The Coming of Spring

Ryan James McGuckin

With wind,
The constant comb of gray and clouds
Arcing all over makes March into October
Within the hour. Past the lamps and windows
At home

And, later on, past the mirrors and doors
In the car, the weather is a scent
We didn't know we once knew was
More than a friend. This weather is

Where what we most miss used to stand
As we stand again in this same tide, somehow,
Still feeling surprised you aren't colored here,
As if this day was the tint you could only wear.
Knowing not how things vanish in life,
When seasons come out of the dark,
We wonder if this next month
Will bring something back,

Like the long-away photos we find
And learn, by sight,
That we've forgotten they're
Every color and corner we still wish for.

The Evening Sleep

Ryan James McGuckin

With lights out
It seems to fold in on itself
And churn without movement.
Here once more in this dark
Everything seems as far as the fingers.

Looking up, darkness always brings wonder
About the end of feeling. Will it
End mid-sentence? In time
Will we form a good thought or
Wish or try to hear something close?
Is there any pause in the falling of color?

With no time left to tell others,
With all the clocks off and
Signals gone from all corners in the air,
Each night we close again
And forget everything
In something blacker than space
Where the universe dims
During our last thought. And still

We fear death and think others never will
Have this gravity at the end of everything
In their eyes
When the sun pulls us past
That line the living can never reach where
Those gone are pulled over the edge
That the living will never find
With their hands.

The Cuckoo's Cry

Even in Kyoto . . . I long for Kyoto —Basho

Rhonda Shary

Meticulously washed
Sorting and re-folding
the baby clothes are saved

they were left to mildew
in the insufficient trunk

Seeing her parents'
clinging to these objects,
the daughter smiles
feeling a youth's gentle scorn

The Surfer Boys of Wellfleet

Rhonda Shary

Just because their jobs
require sandy feet and uncombed hair
that glances off their shoulders
are we to think that they are
not responsible adults?

Who wouldn't want
to go again
and again
into the waves
wait for the right set
and rise to the board with grace and focus

To prefer the gift of vast and seamless oceanic time
To keep a summer house in good repair
and watch horizons from a high cliff
to be warden of no intellectual life
a slave to no material obsession

In their dreams begin responsibilities

“What Are You Reading These Days?”

James Sherwood

. . . asked a friend recently.
I had to think for a moment,
and then I said:
I’ve been reading
the angle and color of the sun as it rises,
the patterns of cloud in the sky
the tracks of the wind across deer-beds
or half-mown hayfields . . .
I said I’ve been leafing through
hoof- and paw-prints in the
dusty earth,
the origin and composition of
dung on rock . . .
I’ve been reading rivers and streams—
rushing and still, high or dry . . .
I’ve been burying myself in
corpses; the glistening or desiccated,
bloated or thin carcasses
of fox, possum, deer, bird, or groundhog.
I’ve been poring over the rainwash ripples in sand,
the detritus caught against this stone or that
on its inexorable path downward.
I’ve been viewing the polygon mudcracks
on the hottest days . . .
I’ve been deciphering the shaded, damp green moss
clinging to the feet of trees,
and studying the lichen-maps
wrapped around boulders . . .
I’ve been skimming over traffic—
both automotive and pedestrian—
flowing through, within
and around towns and byways . . .
I’ve been decoding the footfalls on my
creaking ceiling and the stereo bass-thrum

through my floor . . .
I've been interpreting
my breath
my beating heart
the rush of arterial blood . . .

I've been apprehending my
reflection in my eyes,
the lines in my face
the paths I did and did not take . . .

Wounded Memoir

Robert Singleton

It was a good place to hide
(until you showed up that is).

I've heard your question once,
and that's all I'm going to say
while I sit in the rain on this cursed boulder.
It's questions like that one that got me here in the first place.
So I'll write my wounded scrawl on the next imaginary hill
and leave it for you to figure out
(hope it's not a bastard like the last one)
and with this splintered bone
I'll curse you for making me remember it all

What was it like where I died?
How about this?

A fallen tree limb provided a crooked ladder for me to climb down,
Its rotting branches a crude form of balance.
The rain slipped like snake skin over lichen walls,
turning green to red and crimson to amber as my eyes slowly closed
and I realized I couldn't crawl out again.

Yes, it was Just as glorious as it sounds
but such a good place to hide and wait.

(I've heard that the Apaches consider waiting an art form,
but really all I remember about Apache country was the dust).
Now, like the Apache, I'll honor stillness,
And so should you.

Once I got down there
I found that the rocks formed a kind of pivot for my back
while keeping this ragged uniform soaking wet
just as a reminder that I'll never leave this place.
The rain saturates every surface and smells like burned powder.
It gives no room for compromise.

Now where are those ranks that I fell from?
Those fine patriotic speeches?

But here's the answer
to your initial question.

Could I go back in time for just a moment
I'd pick the one
before I walked down that hill
to sail to America
and then I'd turn around.

Another Summer Night Near Baghdad

Patrick J. Skea

I thought there would be ample downtime in Taji. The mail had learned to function; my father sent regular care packages. I could stage an attack on Ulysses. The paperback came in 4 weeks, wrapped twice around in brown paper. "Language of Flowers. They like it because no-one can hear," faded under the Specialist's shoulder tap. Another mission. We rolled under night cover in the up-armored stomach, out 3 clicks past one of the -diyas. A smoldering hole in the asphalt, 2 goats blinking at their child-girl driver, a fractured Rhino shell, and heat. I peeled hand-skin off the steering wheel as its column melted into the metal. I dropped a found thumb in my cargo pocket with the sand and the lucky spent round. Held by pogue mps at the fob gate, I climbed onto the HET roof. It felt April desert cool, the sun barely rising as the Imam intoned the call. Aquamarine triangles of holiday lights blurred their descent from the minaret to the road. The landscape had become muted. A breeze blew around me from behind. I fingered the sand grains in my pocket. I felt the dawn prayer begin. I smelt the throbs of a scalded right hand. I heard Joyce whisper from a hundred years away as I fondled the safety of my weapon. My father put the stamps on another care package. For the first time, I considered growing old.

9 Years Old and Very Smart

Patrick J. Skea

“I’ve been to see our daughter. She is 9 years old now and very smart. She thanks you for the books you send. Next year maybe more Harry Potter and less Dostoevsky. I hope you are Well. Elise.”

The ex-soldier returned the letter to its envelope, and turned his phone Off. He bought two boxes of Empty birthday invitations and three bottles of poor scotch. In an unlit room with the deadbolt drawn, for three days he burned the cards in an aluminum Trash bin. One by one. Sipping. Green sparks Retreated from the teddy bear Ink. After, he placed the envelope on his yellowed deployment orders in a desk drawer marked Miscellany.

“Breaking and Entering the Works of Sherman Alexie”:
A Literary Symposium

The following are transcripts of remarks given by five speakers at the Literary Symposium “Breaking and Entering the Works of Sherman Alexie,” organized by Dr. Matthew Newcomb, Coordinator of the SUNY New Paltz Composition Program and Joann Deiudicibus, MA, Composition Program Assistant, as the culminating event of the 2011 One Book One New Paltz / Common Summer Read collaboration. The Symposium was presented on October 29 at Elting Memorial Library and November 4, 2011 at SUNY New Paltz. While the presentations focused on Sherman Alexie’s *War Dances* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, the two works featured in events and discussions at the college and in the community during the preceding months, other works, including his most recent poetry collection, *Face*, were also discussed.

—RS

Alexie's Young Adult Novel Tricked an Undergraduate
White Boy

Dean Engle

Reading young adult literature sometimes feels like a simple game of “spot the symbol,” and the first nine-tenths of Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* admittedly seems like analytic target practice. An Indian character with two names leaves the reservation to attend a white school. There is a distinct dichotomy between the “rez” and the white world. The Indians treat him as a traitor and the Whites see him as an invader. The protagonist (Arnold Spirit, called “Junior” on the rez) must decide where his cultural loyalties lie. This conflict is a metaphor not only for people struggling with assimilation, but also for adolescence in general. Adolescence is inherently reactionary, when we build identities by either subscribing to or rebelling against our social surroundings. Arnold just does it more explicitly than most of us.

Through most of the novel, Arnold is distinctly conscious of his social position. There are even visual representations of his obvious dual identity through cartoons embedded in the narrative, such as the one where a line literally divides Arnold in two, one half labeled “WHITE” and the other “INDIAN.” Directly before that cartoon appears in the text, Arnold says, “Reardon was the opposite of the rez. It was the opposite of my family. It was the opposite of me” (56). The kid gets it, and Alexie purposely makes it easy for the reader to understand the conflict, too.

On a less superficial level, Arnold struggles with the White vs. Indian dichotomy primarily through his relationship with Rowdy, his former best friend, who essentially represents Junior’s Reservation “id.” Violent and angry, Rowdy thrives in the rez setting, but the reader can easily see that his contextual success is not very desirable. At Rearden, Arnold becomes friends with a brainy white student named Gordy, a straightforward white equivalent who similarly reflects his own culture’s values. Rowdy and Gordy represent success in their respective settings. Junior is too wussy for the rez, and Arnold lacks the privilege to compete with his rich white classmates. His skills and background seem ill suited for either setting. The conflict is easy to identify and comfortable to unpack. All the old narratives of class and race seem secure. The White/Indian divide looks increasingly difficult to overcome. Good try, Arnold. Better luck next time.

Luckily, the last ten pages of the book render problematic my initial white boy assumptions. Up until the very end, Junior reacts with his sur-

roundings through a red/white lens, struggling to navigate the intense cultural dichotomy. His problem seems unsolvable, and our lucidly perceptive narrator finally hits a wall. Out of that blockage comes a deeply ambiguous story which massively shifts the narrative's focus. But first, Junior, in the midst of a cathartic tirade catalyzed by his sister's death, makes a breakthrough by identifying himself through characteristics besides race. He catalogs the various "tribes" to which he belongs, such as "cartoonists," "beloved sons," "boys who really missed their best friend," and (perhaps most tellingly) "American immigrants" (217). Junior also states that "somehow or another, Indians have forgotten that reservations were meant to be death camps" (217). Surrounded by numerous rez-related deaths, Junior consciously identifies that though he grew up on the reservation, it is not his "true" home. The story's conflict shifts to a previously concealed struggle, the tricky task of differentiating his rez identity from his Indian identity. For the first time, Junior recognizes that they are not the same thing. Alexie presents this information fairly explicitly before moving on to an anecdote which resists explication.

After the revelation and subsequent catalog, Arnold recounts a story passed down from his father about Turtle Lake, a body of water on the rez formed from a crater. "That lake was, like, *forever* deep," he tells us (223). Scientists cannot measure its depth because a nearby uranium mine makes their "radar/sonar machines go nuts" (modernity's ineffectiveness/counter productivity will become important). A horse, named "Stupid Horse," drowns in the lake. Disturbingly, "a few weeks later, Stupid Horse's body washed up on the shores of Benjamin Lake, ten miles away from Turtle Lake," which people laughed off as a practical joke before some guys drove the carcass to the city dump and burned it (223). A few weeks after that, Turtle Lake *catches on fire*. Once the fire goes out, Stupid Horse's body is found once again "despite being burned at the dump, and being burned again in the lake of fire" (224). The dead body rots at an eerily slow pace before "the skeleton collapsed into a pile of bones. And the water and the wind dragged them away" (224).

Up until now, Arnold has very explicitly explained his experiences on both an intellectual and emotional level. But what is his comment after this extended, seemingly illogical aside? He exclaims: "It was a freaky story!" (224). That's it. That's all we get. And that's really important. Until this moment, Arnold has been influenced by the established expectations of both communities. Those obvious dichotomies and conflicts which were so satisfying to unpack and easy to recognize were his problem all along, because Arnold is not a reservation Indian and he is not white and he is not something in between. He is the start of something new. That realization, like the story of Stupid Horse, is mysterious, ambiguous, and above all pretty freaky.

Rowdy appears like a ghost at the end of this book for one final basket-

ball game, the formerly contentious sport now recast as a scoreless training exercise. Rowdy suggests that Junior's impending flight is a return to tradition. "You're an old-time nomad . . . that's pretty cool," he says, symbolically granting Junior permission to leave on behalf of the rez community (230). Arnold cannot help but ask, "Will we still know each other when we're old men?" to which Rowdy responds, "Who knows anything?" (230). Junior has come to terms with his rez identity and with the fact that he must leave, but now what?

At this point, there are no symbols or narratives or metaphors because there is no precedent for the future Arnold must now forge. There is a blank page at the end of this book and here it means something. Junior's victory is that blankness, that lack of fate. Though heavy with uncertainty, it is an optimistic ending, laden with the opportunity and limitless future that in an ideal world every adolescent would have the right to experience.

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“These Be the *War Dances*”: An Argument for Poetry as Lived-Experience

Sarah Hurd

Does poetry have a place in our world? With liberal arts educations facing more challenge and literature itself focusing more heavily upon prose, where do we find poetry, and who's even looking for it anymore? Often, poetry is banished to the outskirts of classes (with the exception of some, but not all, English courses) and rarely sees more than the occasional coffee table. Poetry is considered intentionally difficult, too self-expressive, too ephemeral, and too impractical. Poetry doesn't teach us how to write effective argumentative essays. It doesn't translate into understanding the rhetorical situation, and it doesn't help students become better critics. Oh, and it definitely isn't fun to read on a lazy Sunday afternoon, after we take the dogs for a walk.

I argue that poetry is important because its form allows us to experience narrative in a different way. It functions to record “lived-experience” in a way different from prose and therefore becomes a contextual companion to works of fiction. By using the conventions of poetry, Alexie allows the form of poetry to speak in addition to the stories themselves, allowing for a unity of style and content that is absent in prose. Using two animal poems from *War Dances*, Alexie makes an argument for poetry as an independent recording of “lived-experience” *and* as a contextual companion that opens up themes explored in accompanying prose pieces, making poetry an inescapable component of the text, of our literary canon, and of how we record our own lives.

An Argument for Form: “The Limited” as Meta-Poem

While my discussion focuses on two poems in *War Dances* (because I only have so much time), you will find many of his poems function to enact these features. Let's begin with Alexie's first poem, “The Limited.” This poem opens the entire text and sets the tone for the book at large. Poetry fans rejoice! Alexie begins the book with a poem, rather than a prose piece. And yet, while functioning clearly as a poem, it also discusses the recurring themes of testimony, narrative, and place that pervade the text.

A gloss of the poem illustrates its purpose as a meta-narrative that sets limitations of human agency and action in opposition to the unlimited potential of narrative. The poem itself is about a man who observes another man actively try to hit a dog with his car. This “reaction” leads the speaker to question the limitations of his response, to make the distinction between

contemplation and activity. Finally, he arrives at a revelation: the only action he can take is the act of narration, of recorded testimony. Thus, the title opens up to summarize the crisis of the poem; the speaker is “limited” in his understanding of and reaction to the event and can only “save his own life” through composing a narrative.

And how peculiar a revelation for Alexie to *record* within a poem! When we think of narrative, perhaps even try to define the word “story,” we think of novels, fairy tales, campfire whisperings. The closest the association comes to reaching poetry is perhaps the nebulous nursery rhyme. Yet, I’d like to redefine narrative in the context of how Alexie’s poems operate to record “lived-experience,” or the choice to represent a select incident among the thousands of occurrences in our lives. Think about a quick hop on a New York City subway. As we recite the words of Ezra Pound, we know we won’t remember all of the apparitions of faces we see. And yet, you spot an incredible pair of red shoes, someone tearfully whispering into their iPhone, the smell of bleach (or something worse). Alexie, in this poem (and many others), envelops a succinct “life-experience” within the confines of poetic form. These features make the poem sound more like the narratives we’re used to hearing, blurring the line between poetry and prose, and making narrative poetry much more enjoyable.

The poem is organized in quatrains, the ever-recognizable four-line stanzas, with each stanza representing a distinct chunk of time. Written in syllabic verse (where we count each syllable of the line, instead of accents), Alexie constructs each five- or seven-syllable line in conversational language, furthering the narrative thrust of the poem. Finally, Alexie uses enjambed lines to remind us (once again) that, while we *are* reading a poem, we’re reading a poem that sounds just like a story. Thus, all the many recognizable “signs” of poetry remind us that we’re reading a poem, but also illustrate the ways in which these signs create a different aesthetic experience than that of a prose piece.

While this poem does challenge the strict binary definitions between prose and verse, it also utilizes the most enigmatic and interesting aspect of stanzaic organization, and perhaps poetry in general: the use of blank space. We refer to the space between each quatrain as the “white space,” and what seems like a meaningless organizational strategy can manifest into a device that comments upon or furthers the narrative. Alexie, like many other poets, uses the blank space deliberately to create suspense between each stanza. Because his stanzas represent distinct incidences in the narrative, the white space acts to pause and transition each event. Thus, the pause inevitably creates buildup. Take the space between stanzas two and three: “At the next red light” couldn’t be more loaded with suspense. We just read a testimony of a

horrific and thoughtless act, and suddenly we're being pushed forward in time (to the next red light). Is the man going to try and hit the dog again? Sundry things could happen at the next red light, and Alexie forces us to consider all these things as we move optically between the two stanzas. This use of white space pervades the poem and reminds us of the poem's deliberate structure. Therefore, Alexie captures a narrative within the concrete walls of this poem and allows these walls to become meaning-making vehicles that create a distinctly new and dynamic narrative with a self-affirming purpose.

Contextual Companion: "The Theology of Reptiles"

"The Theology of Reptiles" appears near the halfway point of the text, enveloped between two prose pieces, "War Dances" and "Catechism." This poem, more than perhaps any of the others, illustrates another celebratory component of Alexie's poetry: the poem as contextual companion, in that it works to rewrite the enveloping prose texts in new thematic and formal ways.

"The Theology of Reptiles," a sonnet-like (note the fourteen-line structure) poem about a snake, does "speak to" what comes before and after the poem, while also maintaining its own independence. "War Dances," the prefacing piece, represents Alexie's rumination on illness and death through an interrogation of his own illness and that of his father. "Catechism," the following piece, is a dialogic piece about God and ritual. How appropriate for "The Theology of Reptiles" to fall right in the center of these two texts. The poem begins, in the very first line, with the word "dead" and arrives at the word "god," addressing themes of God's absolute power and human action (as in "The Limited"), while building its companion piece as a formally wrought poem.

"The Theology of Reptiles" clearly gestures to the Shakespearean sonnet in both form and content, while also maintaining the distinctly contemporary and conversational feel of Alexie's poetry. The stanzas are arranged in three quatrains (as in "The Limited"), representing chronological chunks of time. But, within each quatrain, the lines are grouped in an 'abba' rhyme scheme (a departure from Shakespeare's 'abab' rhyme scheme). This poem, like "The Limited," is rendered syllabically (rather than accentually, like Shakespeare's iambic pentameter), challenging the convention of the sonnet and breathing new life into it. The eight-syllable lines are conversational, allowing the enjambed lines to flow through the narrative as if this were a story recollected and retold in conversation.

Of course, Alexie maintains the integrity and interest of the Shakespearean form through the final couplet. The "couplet" (two-line stanza) at the end of the poem (following the three quatrains) represents the epigrammatic puzzle of the Shakespearean sonnet and retells the thematic considerations of

the surrounding prose pieces. While the chronology of events explains how the speaker arrived at analogizing his brother to “one snake’s god,” it certainly doesn’t anticipate or gesture towards that conundrum. Any familiarity with the Shakespearean verse form would have acted to cushion us against this epistemological blow, thus allowing Alexie to flaunt his allusive muscles.

After we acknowledge Alexie’s Shakespearean maneuver, we’re still completely confounded by the riddle the poem presents. That is the point of the poetic form. Rather than create a simple narrative, à la campfire story, Alexie gives us a riddle we can’t quite puzzle through. As we go through our re-readings of the poem, we can perhaps formulate an argument that the brother only became “one snake’s god” because the speaker wrote it to be so. That is, the event was filtered through the *human* speaker’s perception, and he projected the god-like persona onto his brother. If we try to discern the riddle of the sphinx (or in this case, the snake), we’re arriving at something vaguely meta-fictional. We’re considering how the story is told by questioning the authority of the speaker. Ultimately, we’re interrogating what it means to tell a story. Thus, we’re interrogating our own vision of narrative.

The final poem in the book, and the concluding piece, “Food Chain,” represents the speaker’s will and functions to amalgamate all the unique and productive facets of Alexie’s verse. The poem, almost entirely rendered in couplets (some rhyming), begins with the line, “This is my will:” and ends with the affirmation, “I loved my life.” While many beautiful images occur in between these statements, the two lines are perhaps the most tangible indicators of what poetry can do in the context of our world. With Alexie’s poetry, we’re encouraged to think both locally and globally, taking into consideration the story as “lived-experience,” but also the mechanism of recording the story. Almost all of the poems in this collection are meta-moments that draw us into the artistry of their creation and simultaneously encourage us to think about what constitutes an effective narrative.

By including poetry as a companion piece to each work of prose, Alexie posits a daring and innovative counter to assumptions about poetry. Whether it’s playing with blank space, compiling interesting sounds with syllabic meter, or supplying us with new rhyme schemes, Alexie shows us how poetry can allow us to provide witness, record real-life, and work through trauma in order to grow spiritually and intellectually.

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The Limits of Compassion and Art in the Works of
Sherman Alexie

Rhonda Shary

As this collaboration of the 2011 Common Summer Read and One Book/One New Paltz comes to a close, and we seek to synthesize and reflect on the myriad experiences that we have shared as teachers, students, and community readers in immersing ourselves in *War Dances*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and perhaps other works by Sherman Alexie as well, I am drawn to a question that has been forming over the past decades that I have been reading this fiercely passionate, hilarious, and generous author, and that has been the subject of much fierce debate among his peers. It is a question that arises frequently and centrally for students as well, which I try to put now in a succinct way: What is the point of all that dancing and, especially, of so much drinking? Is there a purpose beyond representing a culture, giving voice to lives and a history that are unknown to most college students and general readers? Put another way, this question really means: What is our relationship, as readers, to this literature? How are we to enter it in an active way, as something more and better than voyeurs or tourists?

The gesture of the authors of Native literature is certainly many-fold. We can think of this literature variously as a literature of witness, a post-colonial literature, memoir, autobiography, and certainly as works that have now entered the canon as contemporary masterpieces of fiction, with post-modern interests in style and aesthetics in addition to tribal or cultural identity. I am thinking today of another possibility for entering Alexie's work that has arisen out of the recurring images of pawn shops and alcoholics and water and, perhaps most significantly, of the sacred or ceremonial dance.

These images recur as a binding thread throughout his body of work, from *The Business of Fancydancing*, his first publication in 1992 (like *War Dances*, also a collection of works in several genres, and one that prompted The New York Times to hail Alexie as "a major new lyric voice") through *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), *Ten Little Indians* (2003), and the two works we have spent this autumn with. Following the publication of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and subsequently with *Reservation Blues*, Alexie's critics swarmed. He was severely criticized by his peers for, as they put it, perpetuating the worst stereotypes and presenting Native American experience—to outsiders—in such bleak and seemingly self-destructive circumstances (Bird, Owens, and others). Other critics have suggested that Alexie ought to be read, in this regard, as a "consciously moral satirist rather

than as a ‘cultural traitor’” (Evans). The keen wit, the ironic, unsparing humor that is so integral to his style may soften the load of so much grief, and his hip, pop-culture references might distract us from the long history of cultural genocide lying behind them, but is the moral purpose of reaching toward redemption or of satirizing hypocrisies of both societies enough to justify such “exposure”? Why show (and tell) such raw stories of Indian people at their most desperate? Why dwell on this grief, these abject human failures, at all? Surely more than his claim to a faithful, realistic depiction of “reservation life” is at stake.

A key scene in the masterpiece from *Ten Little Indians*, the award-winning story “What You Pawn I Will Redeem,” suggests a further purpose. The central character of this story, Jackson Jackson, is a homeless member of the Spokane tribe (to be homeless and a tribal member is the kind of paradox that Alexie relishes, and one that frequently informs and structures his work) who wanders Seattle in a state of deplorable human suffering, ill and dying and alone, but on a mission to “redeem” his grandmother’s traditional regalia from a vanishing and re-appearing pawn shop (again, the co-existing contradictions). After giving away to other homeless Indians all the cash he has earned or received on this day, and that is needed for redemption of the regalia, Jackson lies in a drunken stupor atop a railroad track, encrusted in all his most revolting internal fluids and expelled matter, in need of salvation himself. This is the figure whom Alexie forces us to see, pushing the stereotype to the limit to test our limits. The question: Can *we* embrace *this* revolting figure? (In the story, the police officer who has befriended Jackson does, indeed, embrace him, save him, but that’s his job.)

I have come to believe that there is a specific, redemptive purpose in Alexie’s insistence on the recurring image of the debased alcoholic in his literature. Far from being an exploitive, irresponsible, or limiting stereotype, the alcoholic is instead a challenge Alexie poses to readers to engage in acts of compassion toward characters who embody loss on an almost inconceivable scale—an historic, tragic scale. While religious constructs for articulating this process are unavoidable, and Alexie’s work is much concerned with the presence of religion and spirituality in Native life, they are finally insufficient. So, too, is a moral, philosophical understanding.

Literature can become the means of striving toward such compassion. Certainly, the trope of the alcoholic seeking salvation or struggling for survival occurs not only in other Native authors’ work, but significantly, throughout Western literature as well. As poet and author Diane Glancy (Cherokee) writes in “Ethnic Arts: The Cultural Bridge”: “What ethnic group / doesn’t suffer brokenness? / I read it in the short stories of the white / writers I teach” (62). After claiming that “our ‘humanness’ is the same / whatever the ethnic

group,” she concludes:

We get down to the bones in art.
We find they're the bones of others.
In this there's communication between the
ethnic groups.
& in this there's also the separation.
Why did I wake one morning with the thought
the bridge I'm trying to write about is
different from the grounds it tries to span?
Is it that maybe cultural bridges don't exist?
Maybe there's a reality in the Tower of Babel
& we are the heirs of a divine separation.
But I'm a cultural bridge.
I would negate myself if I believed that.
Yet it seems that art is that discovery.
A discovery I didn't want after all. (65)

Glancy's representation of the poet as bridge relies on language and its expressive powers to overcome the “divine separation” between cultures and all humans. However, through the excessive debasement of his characters and the recurring return to the sacred dance as co-existing within these lives, Alexie suggests that something beyond the artistic relationship between the writer and his audience is necessary, that only a spiritual *act* can finally bridge the gaps of experience between the self and a despised other. Thus, the dance: the place where one's feet meet the ground and one's head touches heaven becomes that *act*. The human body replaces that metaphoric bridge of language, between cultures, between self and other, between circumstance and infinity, and becomes the instrument for engaging in that dance, which is *not* a metaphor.

This event, of Jackson Jackson's final dance in the streets of Seattle, is not couched in political analysis, is not a rage-fueled, if justified and sardonic, cry against the injustices of history and the worst in humanity—in both colonizers and the colonized—but neither does it stop at the metaphoric literary representation of an abstraction. Alexie wishes us to engage in this act, yes, imaginatively, but to engage with this human being in spiritual crisis who shows not only how to redeem himself—“I was my grandmother, dancing” (194)—but also all of history and the reader's divine separation from this experience, through a transcendent embracing of the other, as readers, but more, as human beings.

Alexie's promotional photos have changed. The full-throated laughter we hear in the book cover photos for *Lone Ranger* and *Ten Little Indians* is

replaced on the *War Dances* cover with a silent direct gaze, a sober face full of pain and intelligent anger. The works in this book issue both a challenge and an invitation to readers to enter worlds of pain and loss, and they now encompass the stories of pain and shame that all in America experience, not just its natives. Alexie's idea of compassion is extended also to them, and it is not pity or patronizing, but invites an authentic meeting of the other as one human being to another. This is a huge task, to set aside far more than even prejudice or stereotype or what we might think of as understanding and to hear the stories of those drunks in the gutter, or in burning houses, or splayed across the railroad tracks where they fell, of those not Indians, who are perhaps even sober (it is worth noting here that Alexie often references in interviews the research studies that suggest there are more sober Indian people than sober white people), who broke faith with their wives and children, committed violence against their friends, murdered innocents—to hear these stories as the place where sacred and profane meet and show us how we might live now. Yes, the story is the crucible, but if, within the legacy of centuries of loss and injustice, his vision for the Native human being can encompass the moral strength and largeness of soul to proclaim, without irony, as Jackson Jackson does at the end of his journey, “Do you know how many good men live in this world? Too many to count!” how can we, Alexie's audience of the middle class reading public and intellectual elite, do any less than to step outside the artificial devices of a story and create and sustain a like vision of transcendent compassion within ourselves? Then, the real task is to walk within this vision once the book is closed.

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Who Tells the Story: Sherman Alexie's *War Dances*

Sarah Wyman

While contemporary critics generally eschew reading the author's biography into his or her fiction, many *One Book/One New Paltz* community participants agreed that Alexie's *oeuvre* as a whole invites this sort of investigation. Reading Alexie's memoir, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), for example, enriches one's experience of the more obliquely autobiographical *War Dances* (2009). To this end, I'd like to comment on the relationship between the life and the art of Sherman Alexie on my way to discussing the unifying theme of *War Dances*: who gets to tell the story?

The characters Thomas Builds-the-Fire and Victor Joseph from Alexie's earlier collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993) and from the movie *Smoke Signals* (1998) re-live events from the author's life and combine aspects of Alexie's own character: the geek storyteller who loves the traditions of his people—and the rambunctious basketball player, betrayed by his beloved alcoholic father and proud of his culture. In *War Dances*, the connections are often more tenuous or scattered, but many characters clearly resonate with their creator: the writer-narrator who suffered serious childhood illness, the lustful teen out of place, the confused father/son confronting desire and death.

Who gets to tell the story? Sherman Alexie does, but this project proves less straightforward than it may appear. Postmodern negations of authorship and narrative twists aside, this text plays with the power of representations in a remarkably subtle and searching way. Alexie himself comments that, ironically, the supposedly authentic storytellers or writers of particular ethnicities tend to be the weird ones, the social rejects, such as his character Thomas. As Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez explains:

[One] of Alexie's concerns is that Indian literatures are erroneously assumed by non-Indian readers to represent social and historical realities in ways that other literatures do not. When readers' expectations take an anthropological turn, writers are put in the extremely awkward position of being expected to represent their tribes, communities, and Native America. (57)

Yet, Alexie explains, "Most of us [Indian writers] are outcasts. . . . We don't really fit in within the Indian community, so we write to try to fit in and sound Indian. So it's ironic that we become the spokespeople for Indian country, that we are supposed to be representative of our tribes" (qtd. in Brill de Ramirez

57). Sounding quite like Harlem Renaissance author Zora Neale Hurston (169) and other writers who have struggled to distinguish between ethnic labels and professional titles, Alexie insists on the social function of art in the service of authenticating individual experience and identity: “I want us to write about the way we live” (qtd. in Brill de Ramirez 57). Thus, Alexie demands insider stories that come from everyday life rather than racially charged narratives that rehearse and perpetuate prescribed and romanticized images of the Amerindian. Of course, the everyday for Alexie rarely resembles a typical day for the rest of us.

Indeed, Alexie the self-proclaimed outsider has joined the ranks of important writers in U.S. culture as articulated by many memorable voices. He is proudly aware of his established place within the canon of U.S. literature. In *War Dances* alone, he evokes many great compatriot authors, all who are considered stylistic innovators and, in one way or another, freaks. Explicitly, he names Whitman (120), Melville (171), Faulkner (101), Hemingway (101), Fitzgerald (49), Cheever (170), and others in the course of following his characters through their maneuvers and meditations. Implicitly, he seems to allude to additional superstars as he philosophizes on topics from representations of the human experience to strategies for survival. For example, Paul Nonetheless’s contention that “Americans were shockingly similar” (118) seems reminiscent of Gertrude Stein’s “The Making of Americans.” “The Limited’s” concluding couplet, “the only life I can save / is my own,” echoes Flannery O’Connor’s “The Life You Save May be Your Own.” And George Wilson’s pet editing strategy, “skip the door,” (i.e., omit all unnecessary information) in “Breaking and Entering” (5), recalls Ernest Hemingway’s iceberg theory. As Wilson plumbs the lower limit of realistic portrayal in both fiction and the news media, he regrets passing through a door he would better have skipped. Additional North American voices appear in more ghostly fashion in Alexie’s book. Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko seems to make a shadowy cameo as a harsh critic addressing the white academy in *War Dances* (36). She and Alexie have seriously battled in the past over an exclusive territory for indigenous voices, or the question “who gets to tell the story?” as well as *how* to do so, despite the fact that he admires her novel *Ceremony* as “probably *the* book of Native American literature” (Peterson 114). Even Sethe from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* might haunt this work with her words, “definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined” (190), a key to understanding *War Dances*.

Unbounded by national boundaries, it’s no surprise that Alexie evokes creative free thinkers from other lands and genres as well, most strikingly William Blake (163), Franz Kafka (29), Alfred Tennyson (81), Charles Dickens (52), and implicitly Oscar Wilde with his repeated characterization of fiction

as lying (180-81). These popular yet peculiar storytellers sing in conjunction with that very American alternative canon of pop music, as Alexie references artist/singers from Aretha Franklin to Hall & Oates and makes pop culture references to athletes, film stars, and historical figures, including Chief Joseph and Abraham Lincoln. The author thus places *War Dances* in conversation with the broader western canon of supposedly *high* and alternative cultures, facilitating the inclusion of many celebrated Native American voices.

Various themes tie the varied texts of *War Dances* together. In many interviews, Alexie claims the theme is loss. Other possibilities include change, identity, and the past's reach into the present. The fundamental question of *War Dances*, however, the one that weaves these arguably disjointed pieces into a wonderful cohesive fabric is "who gets to tell the story?" And as a corollary, "how do the tales we all tell represent identity?" In many of the *War Dances* poems and stories one finds a fierce rejection of being defined, edited, or otherwise silenced. Most people react at some fundamental level to the idea of having their expressions altered or reworded and their very identities, by extension, redefined. Alexie investigates the vestiges of such violations in his book.

In "Breaking and Entering," for example, the film editor-narrator attempts to protect the integrity of a young actress by editing out explicit scenes only to find himself misrepresented in the press as a murderous white racist. Yet when he corrects the record by insisting on his Spokane identity, he has to deal with the appalling liberal spin in which his moral dilemma over manslaughter is re-scripted as the result of his own exploitation as a Native person. Strangely enough, as a nod to linguistic arbitrariness, this story's victim's name slides between Briggs and Riggs. Is this simply a typographical error or a sly invitation to read identities more carefully?

The title story, "War Dances" (about a son caring for his dying father while coping with the news of his own possible brain tumor), deals not only with individuals defined by their illness or Indians stereotyping each other as blanket providers, but more remarkably for this study, with the observation of how interview questions frame the analysis of identity. As the narrator attempts to authentically reconstruct his father's and grandfather's life stories, he demonstrates the structuring effects of the research-interview process itself. His father's "exit interview," for example, reveals assumptions and facts about the dying man's alcoholism, parenting skills, and penchant for pig's feet (57).

"The Senator's Son" most overtly addresses identity politics, treating the commonalities between 9/11 terrorists and victims, a coming-out episode, and an appalling hate crime dependent on a mis-identification. Yet even the less sensational details, such as the narrator's switch from private school to public school, engage questions of power engendered by identity and repu-

tation. Here, for example, the son sacrifices or submits to this change (one that separates him from his best friend, Jeremy) for the sake of his politician father's image. In a story on policing sexuality in the service of palatable depictions of propriety, the son suffers disillusionment as his idealized father plans a strategic lie. William's shock over this demystification (as intense as any from "Invisible Dog on a Leash") overshadows other themes and evokes the author's own conflicted relationship with a beloved but flawed father.

"The Ballad of Paul Nonetheless" takes up the theme of defining the other from afar, assigning identity to an unknown apparition misnamed Sara Smile. What is it to be an alluring woman in red pumas, to be a banker, to be crazy, to be Hepburn-perfect, to be good and adulterous at once? "What is your tribe?" Junior asks in the *Diary* (217), as he establishes a parallel list of labels. When the Sara Smile look-alike becomes an adequate place-holder in Paul's web of signification—in his world view—we see how dehumanizing such distanced defining turns out to be. And he's declared crazy for pursuing his own imagination, taken in by his own forceful storytelling above and beyond the arguably artificial reality of the common public space—an airport in Chicago, in Durham, or Detroit.

The most obvious instance of the storytelling theme as a means of self-definition, and editing as an opportunity to colonize another's identity, is "Fearful Symmetry." Here the writer-narrator must surrender his story to the ravages of an all-powerful "imperial" (170) editor. As a writer-for-hire in Hollywood, the screenwriter-narrator cannot construct even a metaphoric escape fire or any other means to protect his identity and his integrity as it plays out in his preservation of an artistic vision. And yet he ultimately saves himself (if not his paycheck) by making an Oscar Wildean leap into the refuge of storytelling in the powerful terms of *lying*, of fictions that can be the greatest weapons of self-defense against the individual and societal forces that circumscribe self-expression.

To return to our community readers, my favorite question of the week was, "why did Alexie call his book *War Dances* if he does not come from a warrior culture?" I would suggest that the answer lies both in the autonomy of the text (as Wilde defined it)—why should fiction have anything to do with real life?—and paradoxically in the book's overt link to the author's life, one that he defines himself in terms of being embattled, of being at war (McFarland 251).

Alexie, who is so humorous, uproariously funny at times, asks some pretty tough questions, including this one: "How do you explain the survival of all of us who were never meant to survive?" Kenneth Lincoln points out that

Native Americans as a composite are the only in-country ethnic group that the U.S. has declared war against, 1860 – 1890. Some existing 560 reservations, 315 in the lower forty-eight states, are natively seen from inside as occupied POW camps. (15)

Returning to my initial comparison between the author's life and his art, one might be reminded of the newborn baby Junior from the *Diary* who, like Alexie himself, was never meant to survive due to hydrocephalus, or water on the brain, the consequences of which kept him often bedridden through the first seven years of his life. Using the trope of the baby who fought to live, Alexie insists on the theme of survival through storytelling.

Telling the story constitutes Alexie's constant battle. It's not just a question of grabbing the mike, learning the language, or finding a publisher. It's also a question of considering the way we all represent ourselves to the world and of the power involved in (mis)defining others. Alexie has staked out his spot in the literary canon of the United States, a nation that should be represented by the trickster crow not the majestic eagle, in his opinion (153). Alexie gets to tell the story, and we all get to listen.

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| *Face*, Footnotes, and Alexie's Language of Subversion

| *Molly McGlennen*

Welcome, and thank you for having me here today. Being relatively new to the area of the Hudson Valley, I'm happy to be part of this really wonderful "One Book" event, and it's encouraging to see a Native American-authored text as the shared reading. Having heard Alexie give talks a few times in the past decade, I know he is very interested in issues of audience and disrupting expectations, what it means to be part of the Native American literary tradition, Spokane cultural traditions and writing's place in that, as well as being a major figure in broad literary circles, his works circulating globally and being translated into over ten different languages.

So, there are these layers of audience he always has before him that he's very conscious of, I believe. I've heard him speak to an audience full of white students and professors on a campus; I've heard him speak to an audience of Indigenous peoples on the Saginaw Chippewa reservation; I've heard him speak to an audience at a bookstore mixed with all different types of people. What I've noticed in those exchanges and what I notice in much of his writing is Alexie's preoccupation with undoing processes of enclosure on many levels. What I mean by that is both in his talks and in his work, and in particular his most recent collection of poems, *Face*, he resists the Western impulse to neatly categorize research, knowledge, genre, hermeneutics, or race, and so on, and thus he is making commentary on the writing process itself in relationship to knowledge production. If writing is a process, as he demonstrates in many of his poems in *Face*, then the writer is forever engaged in revision and self-editing. For example, many poems have an elaborate series of footnotes, marginalia, or running commentary as poems within (or alongside) poems. If he understands writing in this way, then Alexie is also via that practice illustrating storytelling as an on-going process, an act of continuance that defies closure. While footnotes, and scholarship, and Western ways of researching and writing imply absolute authority, individual authorship, and finality, Alexie's poems are calling that ownership into question—even his own right as a poet to tell his stories.

In his poem "Vilify," as in many of his poems, one of those levels of audience is the author finding himself being pressed to speak as THE Native American author, THE Native American voice; paradoxically, Alexie resists that category at the same time he strongly advocates on behalf of Indigenous peoples about issues of representation, issues of inclusion, political rights, and a whole host of Indigenous issues. But at any one moment, Alexie is upsetting

the status quo in a number of ways, whether that's subverting progressivist history, which comes to only one conclusion of America's dominance, with common stepping stones along the way (for example, Columbus's arrival, the Puritans establishing a "city upon the hill," American revolution and establishment of the U.S., the spread of American democracy, etc.), or resisting how American symbolism perpetuates these narratives of dominance (in the poem "Vilify" we see the symbolism of Mount Rushmore). Many of his poems are critical of these meta-narratives by manipulating moments of mediation.

His poem "Vilify" is one such poem that suggests this shifting between formality and subversion, and Native people's *presence* in the legacy of American history making and meaning. This poem is a villanelle, and Alexie tells the reader as much by footnoting the title word:

This poem is a villanelle. Many contemporary poets believe the form to be an ancient one (which is yet another example of experts talking out of their asses) but, according to Amanda French (whom Google dubs an "expert in Digital Humanities"), the modern villanelle with its two alternating refrain lines took shape only with Jean Passerat's sixteenth-century villanelle, "*J'ai Perdu Ma Tourtourelle* ('I Have Lost My Turtle Dove')." Passerat's poem, as translated into English, is a terrible, sentimental piece of crap ("I have lost my turtledove: / Isn't that her gentle coo? / I will go and find my love."), but the villanelle form itself has been used in classic poems by many great poets, including Dylan Thomas, Theodore Roethke, and Elizabeth Bishop. It would seem that the villanelle is best used to express the painful and powerful repetitions of grief. I have tried to write a grief-filled villanelle that is also funny ("Funny grief" being the best answer to the question: "What is Native American poetry?"), and while I don't think it's a great poem, or maybe not even a good one, I do enjoy the punning title. Yes, a villanelle called "Vilify." I tried to title it "Villanelle-i-fication," but I just couldn't live with that hyphenated monstrosity (and it now occurs to me that "I Have Lost My Turtle Dove," with its awful sentimentality, terminal nostalgia, and goofy worship of nature, would also be an answer to the question: "Tell me, Native American writer, why do you need poetry?"). (30)

Here, by footnoting his title, Alexie contextualizes his poem both within and outside of the history of literature and the history of the form, the villanelle; further, he makes commentary on *how* his poem classifies what defines Indigenous poetry, as if the poem isn't doing that already on its own. In that contextualization, however, Alexie underscores the dubious position as a writer that he often finds himself in: being asked to speak on behalf of *all* Native peoples. The illogical question-and-answer at the end of the footnote (that "I

have lost my turtle dove” could serve as an answer to “Tell me, Native American writer, why do you need poetry”) suggests how bogus a category that is, *and*, how necessary, as Alexie is claiming to indigenize the form itself, making the claim that funny grief is what Native American poetry is. The immersive text is not subordinate to the story.

And, this is all before the reader begins reading the poem! There are two ways to proceed. To go back and forth between poem and footnotes, like a weaving of creative/critical commentary, where both narratives inform the reading of one another; or, sequentially, where the poem is read, and then the footnotes act as supplemental information. Either way, the reader is engaging in this tug-of-war between author and authority. In this way, his poem becomes a vehicle of subversive mediation, where poetry intervenes on our expectations of “American” iconography. His refrain line in the poem is “I’ve never been to Mount Rushmore. It’s just too silly. Even now, as I write this, I’m thinking . . .” while the second refrain is the listing of the speaker’s memory of the four faces on the rock: “Is it both Roosevelts, Jefferson, and Lincoln?” Later it turns into “McKinley, Arthur, Garfield, and Lincoln?” The speaker doesn’t know, and that not-knowing becomes inconsequential to the narrative of dominance the iconography produces. For instance, Alexie footnotes “Garfield,” in which he notes the president’s egregious anti-Chinese immigration policies among other things, and in the footnote before (#6), Alexie historicizes Andrew Jackson’s complicity and leadership in the genocide of Native peoples, specifically the Removal Act of 1830 and the ethnic cleansing/death march of 16,000 Cherokee.

By the end of the poem and the end of the lengthy footnotes, including a list of presidents who owned slaves, statistics on the Native holocaust, and the speaker’s thoughts on what makes “good” art, Alexie has provided layers of contexts around a number of issues. What’s interesting is that in the poetic form of a villanelle, where each time the refrain comes around, the reader achieves a renewed and different understanding of the line, the footnotes imply a type of refrain that is corrective in more absolute ways, like Mount Rushmore itself: It commemorates a particular history and fastens social evolution to these white patriarchs—America’s movement from a primitive state (read: Indigenous) to a civilized state (read: Anglo-European). So, the woven text and context suggests the ongoing and interconnected impulse of storytelling and the dangers of harnessing one, thin, linear narrative of explanation toward making meaning in and of our lives.

Yet, in a poem like “Go, Ghost, Go,” in *War Dances* (a text many of you have read as the shared reading for the One Book event), Alexie is again disrupting expectations. A reader might expect sympathy on the part of the speaker toward the professor’s “progressive” ideas about immigration laws, but

Alexie laughs at the idea and then becomes critical of reading Latino immigration as the 21st-century Ghost Dance, as the professor suggests. After all, Alexie asserts, doesn't the professor know that that would require the professor's own death? And in this poem, like "Vilify," that quintessential Alexie humor is present; it's dark, it's sardonic, it's a way for Alexie to jab and move: a reader just can't corner him, nor his convictions, nor define the state of Native America, or pretend to have a handle on what defines Native literature and its purposes. Not without engaging the paradoxes, complexities, and one's responsibility to understand America's genocidal past.

Reading Alexie's latest collection of poems, *Face*, is one way to better understand how he uses poetry to intervene in those complexities that disrupt the comfort of neat categories. In particular, he calls attention to the way poetry can disrupt Western practices of taxonomizing Native histories and experiences because the poems push against the limits of equation that enclose Native lives as "artifacts." And just as we might have the impulse to pin Alexie down, make meaning of his meaning making, he throws us ringers like the last line and the last footnote of "Vilify": "Who's on that damn mountain anyway? Is it Jefferson, Washington, Reagan, and Lincoln?" (30). A footnote to "Reagan" reads:

An excerpt from *The Handbook to 21st Century Inconsequentially Treasonous American Artists*: "Mr. Alexie, why did you inaccurately put Ronald Reagan's name on the list of presidents memorialized on Mount Rushmore?" "I'm sorry, but I don't recall." (38)

Alexie is not shirking the truth, nor constructing a lie, but calling our attention to the dangerous business of sanctifying American history in reductive and symbolic narratives.

Thank you.

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VI | Thesis Abstracts

Hemingway, Love, and Legacy: Twentieth-Century Texts That Tackle Impasse in Romantic Relationships

Jesse Cersosimo

The shape and texture of our most significant human bonds, our romantic relationships, is substantially determined by the stories we tell each other about love and its generative possibilities for happiness and fulfillment. At least this is a fair conclusion if we accept Jean Baudrillard's theory of the "hyperreal," the idea that endlessly reproduced texts transcend their initial ambition of reflecting our values and ideas and move into the very definitional space of constructing truth and possibility for future generations. The short stories of Ernest Hemingway occupy this hyperreal space in the minds of millions of twentieth-century readers, and writers especially. For every iconic story Hemingway told about a bullfighter, boxer, or big game hunter, there is also a "domestic" one about a young couple in romantic turmoil. Yet, these stories too are infused with Hemingway's "code," his particular set of values constituted in large part by his Catholic faith. Later American writers who tell relationship stories must countenance Hemingway's legacy and his heavy ideological content, in addition to the reigning epistemologies of their own time. Raymond Carver grapples with Hemingway's legacy in the postmodern era of de-centered belief and unstable signification, depicting lovers painfully and perpetually alienated from each other by their isolated subjectivity, while David Foster Wallace aims to recuperate a set of common values, the sort that underlie Hemingway's code, but without the same rigid inscription that forces Hemingway's lovers toward dissolution. Rather than punishing lovers who transgress absolutes, or resigning nihilistically to the lack thereof, Wallace embraces the indeterminacy of language as the necessarily malleable site of connection between lovers.

Appropriations of the Storm:
Re-Visions of Nature Representations in *King Lear*, *Ran*,
and *A Thousand Acres*

Lee Conell

Although ingrained in our cultural consciousness as the work of Shakespeare, the story of *King Lear* has a long history, appearing in a variety of contexts and forms before Shakespeare shaped the tale into what we know today. While Shakespeare has given us the most definitive rendering of the story, to ignore these earlier visions and versions of *Lear* is to prevent ourselves from fully grasping the weighted implications behind the radical departures Shakespeare makes from his source texts. I analyze Shakespeare's departures from the representations of nature that appear in older versions of the story in order to bring to the fore the radical vision of nature presented in *King Lear*. I then investigate contemporary re-visionings of *King Lear*, such as Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* and Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*, to reveal the way images of nature from the *Lear* story have continued to be reflected and transmuted both by individual artists and by the divergent mediums in which they work.

Illuminating the Past: The Transmission of Holocaust
Experience to the Third Generation

Michelle S. Kramisen

Because of the lack of knowledge of how trauma can be transferred down through generations, the third generation of Holocaust survivors lacks an understanding of trauma from first generation survivors. Our distance from the event does not mean we are not capable of understanding what horror they went through, and we see a push for the second and third generations to re-create the journeys of their loved ones through the literature of Art Spiegelman and Jonathan Safran Foer.

We cannot escape the trauma of such colossal events in history, and we must accept that proximity is not necessary to experience the trauma. In fact, it is up to the third generation to plow through the guilt of feeling distant from history and create ways to keep the history of this trauma alive. We can accept the transference, even transmission of trauma through literature and testimonies, and through that we keep history alive for future generations, reawakening the trauma. We must take accountability for being a witness to what our ancestors experienced, as history can never be invisible. We must continue to listen to Holocaust survivors while they are still alive to complete the cycle of listening to and re-telling of history.

Towards an Environmentalist Academics: Locating
Activist Sensibilities in American Ecological Literature

Christopher Lawrence

Are academics and activism necessarily disparate entities? This widely debated issue within the field of Ecocriticism is, in essence, a disagreement as to where the line should be drawn between what qualifies as literary criticism and what ventures into the realm of sociological, political science, and/or cultural studies territory. This paper argues that, in the case of Ecocriticism, no such distinction necessarily needs to, or should be, made. Beginning with a foundational definition of what the original ecocritics initially sought to accomplish within the realm of academia, the discussion then turns to a consideration of constructive versus counterproductive activist activities, and finally to a consideration of how sound ecocritical literary analysis can ultimately lead to constructive and civically responsible environmental activism. Particular effort is made to offer realistic suggestions on how to integrate ecocritical sensibilities into even the most traditional of college literature classrooms.

VI | News and Notes

In this column we feature news from current and recent graduate students: honors, achievements, publications, conference papers, progress in PhD programs, and other news.

1. Professional activities and achievements of current MA and MAT students and December 2011 graduates:

Jeffrey Canino (MA) presented a paper at Tufts University's 1st Annual Graduate Humanities Conference, Medford, MA, February 2012.

Lee Conell (MA) will enter the MFA program at Vanderbilt University. She presented a paper at the 13th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference, St Catharine College, KY, April 2011.

Jessica Conti (MAT) published the article "Intertextualities and Identity: Elizabeth Madox Roberts' 'The Scarecrow' and Robert Penn Warren's *The Cave*" in *Reading Roberts: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed. H. R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel, West Park, NY: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012. She also presented papers at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference in Atlanta, GA, November 2011; and the 13th and 14th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conferences, St. Catharine College, KY, April 2011 and 2012.

Mary Ellen Iatropoulos (MA/MAT) presented a paper at South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference in Atlanta, GA, November 2011.

Michelle Kramisen (MA) presented papers at the 13th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference, St Catharine College, KY, April 2011; the Fifth Biennial Rebecca West Conference, New York City, September 2011; and the Faulkner and West Point at 50 Conference, West Point, NY, April 2012.

Christopher Lawrence (MA) will enter the English PhD program at the University of Nevada, Reno.

He published two articles: “‘Because we carry the fire’: An Eco-Marxist Reading of Cannibalism in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*” in *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1.13, 2011.

“A Life Apart: Ecocritical Considerations of the Pastoral Vision in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ *The Time of Man*” in *Reading Roberts: Prospect and Retrospect*, ed. H. R. Stoneback, William Boyle, and Matthew Nickel, West Park, NY: The Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society, 2012.

He also presented papers at the *Midwest American Culture Association*, Milwaukee, WI, October 2011 and the 14th Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conferences, St. Catharine College, KY, April 2012.

Michael Renganeschi (MA) published “‘The old ship is steady again’: Empathy and *The Divine Comedy* in ‘Down at the Dinghy’” in *Teaching Salinger’s Nine Stories*, New Street Communications, 2011.

2. Graduates of our MA program in PhD and other post-baccalaureate programs:

Michael Beilfuss (2005) at Texas A&M University (PhD English)

Danielle Bienvenue Bray (2004) at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette (PhD English)

Nicole Camastra (2005) at the University of Georgia (PhD English)

D. A. Carpenter (2005) at Texas A&M University (PhD English)

Kevin Cavanaugh (2002), at the University of Albany (PhD Curriculum/Instruction Program)

Thomas Doran (2010) at the University of California, Santa Barbara (PhD English)

Timothy Gilmore (2004) at the University of California, Santa Barbara (PhD English)

Valerie Hughes (2010) at SUNY Buffalo (MS Library Science)

Katherine Hurd (2005) Indiana University (MS Education/Instructional Systems Technology)

Tina Iraca (2001) at the University of Connecticut (PhD English)

Jennifer Lee (2007) at the University of Rhode Island (PhD Rhetoric and Composition)

Jaclyn Lyons (2010) at New York University (MS Gallatin School of Individualized Study)

Brad McDuffie (2005) at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (PhD English)

Sharon Peelor (1997) at the University of Oklahoma (PhD Education Studies)

Rachael Price (2005) at the University of Arkansas (PhD English)

Donna Bonsignore Scully (2001) at St. John's University (PhD English)
James Stamant (2005) at Texas A&M University (PhD English)

3. Graduates of our MA program with full-time academic positions:

Eileen Abrahams (2002), Associate Professor of English, Schenectady
County Community College

Cristy Woehling Beemer (2002), Assistant Professor of English, Univer-
sity of New Hampshire

Kevin Cavanaugh (2002), Assistant Professor of English and Human-
ities, Dutchess Community College

Lynne Crockett (1996), Professor of English, Sullivan County Commu-
nity College

Deborah DiPiero (2001), Assistant Professor of English and Director of
Writing, St. Andrews Presbyterian College (Laurinburg, NC)

Dennis Doherty (1991), Instructor of English and Director of Creative
Writing, SUNY New Paltz

Laurence Erussard (1992), Associate Professor of English, Hobart and
William Smith Colleges

Mary Fakler (1994), Instructor of English, SUNY New Paltz

Penny Freel (1995), Instructor of English, SUNY New Paltz

Thomas Goldpaugh (1978), Associate Professor of English, Marist Col-
lege

Thomas Impola (1989), Assistant Professor of English, Ulster County
Community College

Jennifer Kaufman (2003), Instructor of English, Ulster County Com-
munity College

Brad McDuffie (2005), Instructor of English, Nyack College

Michele Morano (1991), Associate Professor of English, DePaul Univer-
sity

Fiona Paton (1991), Assistant Professor of English, SUNY New Paltz

Michael Rambadt (2009), Instructor of English and Humanities,
Dutchess Community College

Rachel Rigolino (1992), Instructor of English and Director of the Com-
position SWW Program, SUNY New Paltz

Arnold A. Schmidt (1990), Professor of English, California State Uni-
versity, Stanislaus

Nicole Boucher Spottke (1996), Assistant Professor of English at Valen-
cia Community College (Orlando, FL)

Kimberley Vanderlaan (1995), Assistant Professor of English, Louisiana
Tech University

Amy Leigh Washburn (2005), Assistant Professor of English, CUNY Kingsborough

4. News from graduates of our MA program:

Eileen Abrahams (2002) was promoted to Associate Professor of English at Schenectady County Community College in 2011. She developed a new Honors Program at SCCC and was appointed Director. She also served as Vice President of the Faculty Council of Community Colleges.

Amanda Boyle (2010) is co-editor, with H. R. Stoneback and Brad McDuffie, of *From Penn's Store to the World: An Anthology of Poems*, Des Hymnagistes Press, 2011.

William Boyle (2006) completed his MFA in Fiction at the University of Mississippi. He published a story, "Zero at the Bone," in *Battling Boxing Stories*, Borgo Press, 2012.

Nicole Camastra (2005) published "Waters of the Fountain Salmacis': Metamorphosis and the Ovidian Subtext in William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*" in *Mississippi Quarterly* 64.3, 2011. She won the Graduate School Dean's Award at the University of Georgia.

D. A. Carpenter (2005) published "Good Man, Honest Man: Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan and the Role of the Folk Outlaw" in *The Life, Music and Thought of Woodie Guthrie: A Critical Appraisal*, ed. John S. Partington, Ashgate, 2011.

Lynne Crockett (1996) received tenure and promotion to Full Professor at Sullivan County Community College in December 2011. She writes a monthly column, "Walking Words," for the *Shawangunk Journal*, Ellenville, New York.

Jenica Shapiro Drehmer (2007) is a Writing Specialist and Student Success Advisor at Corning Community College.

Steven Florczyk (2002) received his PhD in English from the University of Georgia in December 2011. He is now a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Georgia.

Jennifer Lee (2007) is the Assistant Directorship of the Writing Center at the University of Rhode Island.

Brad McDuffie (2005) published the book *Teaching Salinger's Nine Stories*, New Street Communications, 2011. He is also co-editor, with H. R. Stoneback and Amanda Boyle, of *From Penn's Store to the World: An*

Anthology of Poems, Des Hymnagistes Press, 2011.

Nicole Meyers (2007) is an Instructor at Southern Vermont College.

Matthew Nickel (2006) received his PhD in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in December 2011. He published “An attention that is almost holy’: The Spirit of Provence in Durrell and Hemingway” in *Durrell and the City: Collected Essays on Place*, Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2011.

Sharon Peelor (1997) published “Dark Night of the Soul: Analyzing Roberts’ *My Heart and My Flesh* as Philosophy of Education” in *Journal of Philosophy & History of Education* 61.1, 2011. She also wrote “Margaret Haley—Educator for Teachers” for the December 2011 issue of the *The Bullhorn* (SUNY New Paltz Chapter of the UUP). She is currently a GA at the University of Oklahoma and an Adjunct Instructor at Oklahoma City Community College.

Meri Weiss (2006) received a fellowship to attend a writing workshop at the Norman Mailer Writer’s Colony in Provincetown, MA, August 2011.

5. The Editors would remind students of the Russell S. Cleverley Memorial Fellowship, established by Luella and Donald Cleverley in memory of their son Russell S. Cleverley, who earned his MA in English from SUNY New Paltz in December 1995. The Cleverley Fellowship is open to students matriculated in the MA English program with a 3.5 GPA who register for ENG 590, Thesis in English, in the award semester. The amount of the fellowship is \$500. Please submit a letter of application with transcript, the thesis proposal signed by the thesis director, and two letters of recommendation (one from the thesis director) to the English Graduate Director. Applications for the next award (fall 2012) are due May 15, 2012.

VII Guidelines for Submissions

As the journal of the English Graduate Program, the *Shawangunk Review* publishes the proceedings of the annual English Graduate Symposium. In addition, the Editors welcome submissions from English graduate students in any area of literary studies: essays (criticism; theory; historical, cultural, biographical studies), book reviews, scholarly notes, and poetry. English faculty are invited to submit poetry, translations of poetry, and book reviews.

Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with MLA style and should be submitted as an electronic file accompanied by a hard copy. Essays should not exceed 5000 words (15 pages), book reviews 1250 words, poems five pages, and MA thesis abstracts 250 words. With your submission include a brief biographical statement.

Please submit material to the Graduate Director, Department of English, SUNY New Paltz; the deadline for Volume XXIV of the *Review* is December 15, 2012.

VIII Contributors

Liz Bonhag is an English MAT student at SUNY New Paltz, where she received her BA (2007) and was selected as an Outstanding Graduate in English. Her poems “Beans” and “This Year’s Tomatoes” have been published in *Chronogram Magazine*.

Andrew Bruso is an English MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. His primary interest is in contemporary fiction writers. He also presented his Symposium essay at the 2011 Northeast Modern Language Association Conference in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Jeffrey Canino is an English MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. His critical interests are twentieth-century postmodern literature, science fiction, and the horror film.

Marc Cioffi is an English MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. His poetry has been published in *The Stonestrow Review* and *The Chronogram*.

Walter Cohen grew up in the suburbs of NY City, majored in English at Stanford, and received his MA and PhD in Comparative Literature at Berkeley. Since 1980 he has been in the Comparative Literature Department at Cornell. From the start of his time there, bizarrely enough, he has devoted a considerable portion of his time to administrative work—as, among others, chair of two departments, Dean of the Graduate School, Vice Provost of the University, and, currently, Senior Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences. He has written *Drama of a Nation: Public Theater in Renaissance England and Spain* (1985), and co-edited *The Norton Shakespeare* (1st ed. 1997, 2nd ed. 2008). Most of his articles have concerned the Renaissance, but he has also published on criticism and theory, the profession, and most periods of European literature from Antiquity to the present and on the history of world literature. His current book project, entitled *European Literature*, is a history of European literature in relation to the rest of the world. His Symposium address is excerpted from its final chapter.

Lee Conell earned her MA in English from SUNY New Paltz, where she taught first-year composition and was a recipient of the Cleverley Thesis Fellowship. She currently works as a writer in New York City.

Jessica Mackenzie Conti is an English MAT student at SUNY New Paltz and will receive her degree in May 2012. Since 2010 she has presented papers at the Robert Penn Warren Circle Conference, the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference, and the South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference; after graduation in summer 2012 she will present papers at the International Hemingway Society Conference and the International Richard Aldington Society/Imagism Conference.

Robert Cutrera is an English MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz.

Joann K. Deudicibus is the Staff Assistant for the Composition Program and an Adjunct Instructor at SUNY New Paltz, where she earned her MA in English (2003). She is an active member of the Poetry Board. Her interests include cats, creativity and mental illness, and twentieth-century American poetry, particularly the work of Anne Sexton. She is the Associate Editor (poetry) for the *WaterWrites: A Hudson River Anthology*, an anthology celebrating the Hudson 400.

Dennis Doherty is Director of the Creative Writing Program and Chair of the Poetry Board at SUNY New Paltz. His essays, poems, and stories appear throughout the literary press. He is author of three volumes of poetry: *The Bad Man* (Ye Olde Font Shoppe Press, 2004), *Fugitive* (Coddhill Press, 2007), and *Crush Test* (Coddhill Press, 2010).

Dean Engle is an Outstanding Undergraduate Student at SUNY New Paltz and was inducted into Sigma Tau Delta, the National English Honors Society, earlier this year. He is a Secondary Education major with a concentration in English, a Resident Advisor in Scudder Hall, and a prolific songwriter and musician.

Jennifer Gutman is a 2011 graduate from the English MA program at SUNY New Paltz, where she taught Composition I and II for five semesters and served on the Composition Committee for one year. She hopes to spend the upcoming year teaching, traveling, reading, and writing.

Selena Hughes completed the BA in English-Secondary Education in May 2009 and is now an English MA student. She is currently a Teaching Assistant in the Beacon City School District. Her literary interests include Jane Austen, Victorian literature, and the history of the English language.

Sara Hurd is an English MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. In the past year, Sarah presented papers Roberto Bolaño, Don DeLillo, and Sherman Alexie. Sarah's academic interests include Rhetoric and American Romantic poetry. In anticipation of a PhD in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, Sarah will begin work on a Master's Thesis interrogating the Marxist underpinnings of the current discourse regarding third-world epidemic disease.

David J. Hurst is an English MA student at SUNY New Paltz and in his fourth year teaching English at the secondary level. He left the corporate world to pursue teaching, and considers that decision one of the most gratifying in his life.

Molly McGlennen was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota and is of Anishinaabe and European descent. Currently, she is an Assistant Professor of English and Native American Studies at Vassar College. She holds a PhD in Native American Studies from the University of California, Davis and an MFA in Creative Writing from Mills College. Her scholarship and creative writing have been published widely. Most recently her first collection of poetry, *Fried Fish and Flour Biscuits*, was published by Salt's award-winning "Earthworks Series of Native American Authors." Her scholarly manuscript *Creative Alliances: The Transnational Designs of Indigenous Women's Poetry* is forthcoming.

Ryan James McGuckin recently earned his MEd from Long Island University and is currently an English MA student in English at SUNY New Paltz. Previous degree programs include Mannes College, The New School for Music, for performance and composition; SUNY Rockland's Sam Draper M/TS Honors Program (where he placed first with the CCHA as Editor-in-Chief of *Impulse*); and SUNY New Paltz, earning the 2003 Vincent Tomaselli Award for the Creative Writing of Poetry. His research interests include aesthetics, reader-response theory, and the connections between art and literature.

Cyrus Mulready is an Assistant Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz. His research and teaching focus on Shakespeare and the literature and culture of early modern England. He has published essays on dramatic romance and Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*; these materials form the basis of his current book project, which identifies a tradition of romance on the early modern stage that was shaped by England's overseas ambitions.

Matthew Nickel received the PhD in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in December 2011. He has recently co-edited a book of essays on Elizabeth Madox Roberts (*Reading Roberts: Prospect & Retrospect*), and he is currently editing an anthology of poetry, *Kentucky: Poets of Place*.

Scott Schneider is an English MA student at SUNY New Paltz and an English teacher at North Rockland High School in Thiells, NY. His interests are in modern and contemporary poetry, as well as Shakespeare and theatre in general.

Rhonda Shary is an adjunct professor in the English Department at SUNY New Paltz, where she teaches composition and contemporary, women's, and Native American literature. Her poem "Passing by Ossining on Saturday Mornings" appeared in *Water Writes: A Hudson River Anthology in Celebration of the Hudson 400*, and in collaboration with the 2011 Common Summer Read Committee, she edited the study guide for *War Dances*.

James Sherwood received his MA in English from SUNY New Paltz in 2009 and will receive his MAT in Secondary Education in May 2012. He is a poet, copyeditor, flâneur, woodworker, hiker, who measures days in plosives, liquids, nasals and fricatives.

Robert Singleton has a long history at SUNY New Paltz as both student and professor. He is the son of a New Paltz graduate (Natalie Tompkins Singleton, class of 1940), whom he credits with his interest in poetry and literature. He began his teaching career here as a Teaching Assistant in 1987 and went on to receive his MA degree with honors. He has taught a variety of courses at the college since 1995. His interests run from poetry to historical photography as well as genealogical research. He is currently working on a series of poems that attempt to combine all three of those areas of interest. In addition to New Paltz, he also teaches at Marist College in Poughkeepsie.

Patrick J. Skea is an English MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz. A veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, he has written poetry and prose that has appeared in several U.S. Army publications as well as the literary magazine *Artless and Naked*.

H. R. Stoneback is Distinguished Professor at SUNY New Paltz, where he teaches American literature. He is the author or editor of more than 25 volumes of literary criticism and poetry. Recent volumes include *Hemingway's Paris: Our Paris* (New Street 2011) and *Voices of Women Singing* (Codhill Press 2011). He is an officer or board member of several national and international literary organizations, including the Elizabeth Madox Roberts Society (Honorary President) and the International Richard Aldington Society (Vice-President).

Michelle Woods is an Assistant Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz. She teaches European, British and Irish literature, and is interested in the historical and political implications of literary translation, especially to do with the Czech Republic. She is the author of *Translating Milan Kundera* (2006) and *Censoring Translation: Censorship, Theatre and the Politics of Translation* (2012).

Sarah Wyman is an Assistant Professor of English at SUNY New Paltz. She teaches twentieth-century U.S. literature, women's writing, poetry, and word and image studies. Along with her creative writing, she has published scholarly articles on U.S. poetry and fiction, the New Media, and the sister arts of poetry and painting.