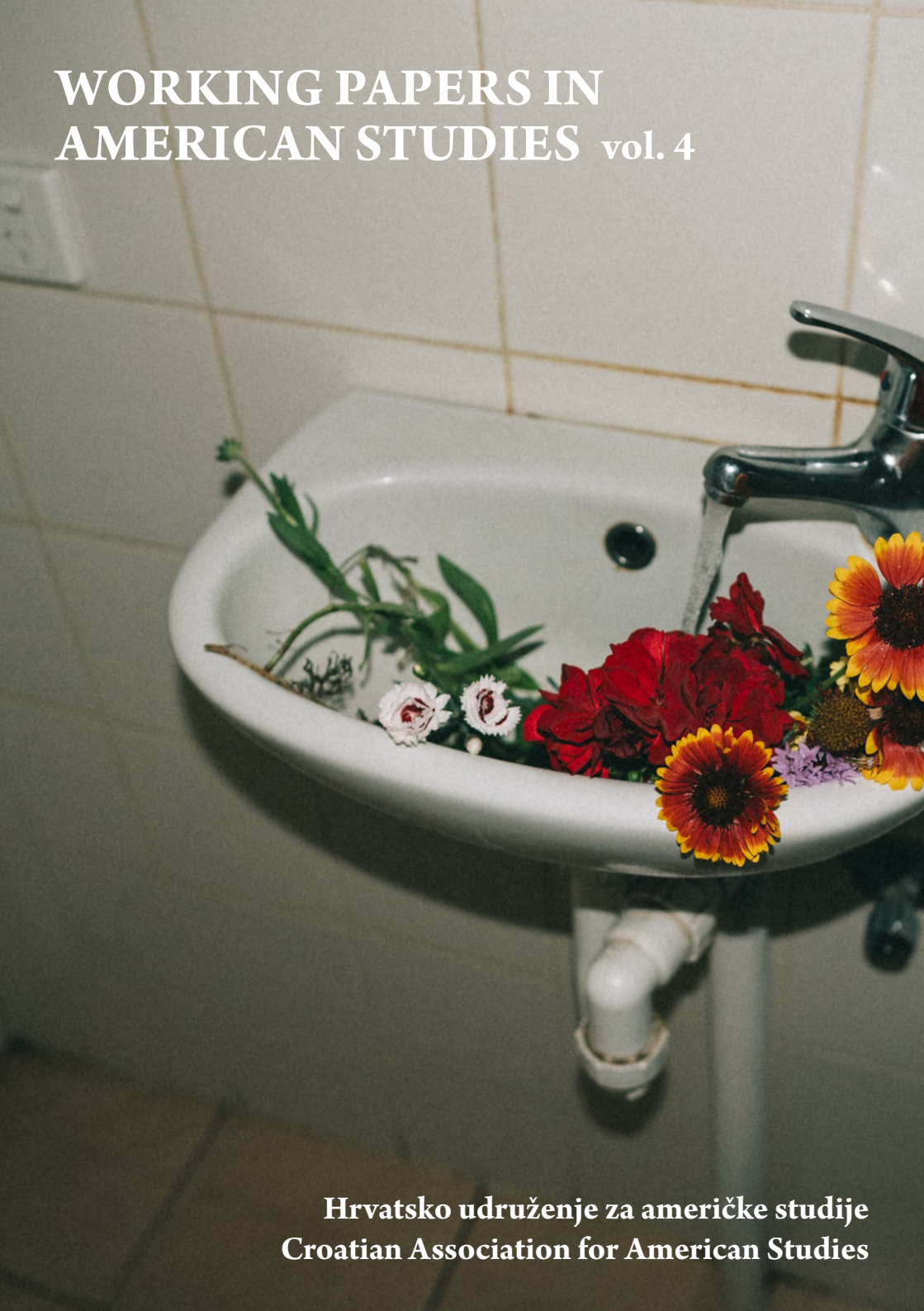
WORKING PAPERS IN AMERICAN STUDIES vol. 4



Hrvatsko udruženje za američke studije
Croatian Association for American Studies

Working Papers in American Studies, Vol. 4

Izdavač / Publisher:
Hrvatsko udruženje za američke studije / Croatian Association for American Studies, FF press

Urednici / Editors-in-Chief:
Jelena Šesnić, Sven Cvek

Uredništvo / Editorial Board:
Marko Lukić, Ljubica Matek, Jasna Poljak Rehlicki

Lektura i korektura / Proofreading:
Alex Hoyt

Dizajn i prijelom / Design & layout:
mood.works

Fotografija / Cover photo:
Kevin Laminto (Unsplash)

Zagreb, 2020.
ISSN 1849-6180

Ova je publikacija objavljena uz financijsku potporu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.

Contents

Preface **4**

1. Tatjana Jukić:
Ophelia Antigonized: A Pre-Raphaelite *Hamlet* for Industrial Modernity 5

2. Tatjana Bijelić:
Exophonic Ecopoetics as a Transformative Force: Concepts and Illustrations 45

3. Stipe Grgas:
What Has Changed in Nature and in the Economy? 68

4. Jelena Šesnić:
Re-centering the History of the Americas: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy* 91

Contributors 121

Editors' Preface

The volume before you contains a selection of contributions from the workshop "Transformation: Nature and Economy in Modern English and American Culture," held at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb on September 24, 2019. Organized by the Croatian Association for American Studies (CAAS) and the Croatian Association for the Study of English (CASE), the workshop hosted a fine array of international and domestic guests and featured the participation of doctoral students. The editors would like to thank Professor Tatjana Jukić Gregurić and Dr. Martina Domines Veliki, who provided invaluable assistance in the organization of the event. We also thank the participants at the workshop and the authors of the contributions. The workshop was organized as part of the research activities carried out under the auspices of the research group "Transatlantic Literature and the Transformation of the World in the Long Nineteenth Century."

In addition, this issue features a contribution on Toni Morrison, whose work continues to capture the attention of academic and general readers.

The editors would like to acknowledge the support provided by the University of Zagreb for the publication of this volume.

Sven Cvek
Jelena Šesnić

Tatjana Jukić
University of Zagreb

Ophelia Antigonized: A Pre-Raphaelite *Hamlet* for Industrial Modernity

Understanding modernity seems to be inflected in the narrative conditions of *Hamlet*: *Hamlet* may be to modernity what the story of Oedipus is to psychoanalysis, a specimen story in which the intellectual constitution of modernity is decided. In this essay I analyze how industrial modernity finds its articulation in *Hamlet*, especially in the positions where *Hamlet* is claimed for realism; realism is taken to mean not a poetics so much as an apparatus instrumental to negotiating the modern condition in the nineteenth century. With a focus on John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1851–2), I discuss how Ophelia replaces Hamlet as a figure where realism is negotiated in Victorian modernity, also as a figure where modern psychopolitics, with its investment in mourning, finds its foothold in the world of the Industrial Revolution. Lastly, I argue that Ophelia may be where the unresolved narrative conditions of Antigone are retained in *Hamlet*, along with the political concerns implicit to Antigone's mourning.

Key words: industrial modernity, *Hamlet, Ophelia*, realism, the Pre-Raphaelites, Antigone

Opening remarks

Understanding modernity seems to be inflected in the narrative conditions of *Hamlet*: Hamlet may be to modernity what the story of Oedipus is to psychoanalysis, a specimen story in which the intellectual constitution of modernity is decided. Freud has been credited with an "unprecedented *transformation of narration into theory*" (Felman 1022) for his reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*; the same may be true of Walter Benjamin, when he argues for a special status of *Hamlet* in modernity. Benjamin singles out *Hamlet* as an exemplary mourning play (*Trauerspiel*), that literary genre where mo-

dernity, according to Benjamin, finds its emphatic early articulation.[1] It has been noted that *Hamlet* is exceptional to Benjamin because it "both exceeds and confirms the basic parameters" of the mourning play (Comay 266–67). In *Hamlet*, therefore, the very constitution of modernity seems to be both decided and exceeded, just as modernity, by this account, receives its confirmation only by a measure of (literary) excess.

In this essay I analyze how industrial modernity finds its articulation in *Hamlet*, especially in the positions where *Hamlet* is claimed for realism in the nineteenth century: realism in the nineteenth century being not so much a poetics as an apparatus instrumental to negotiating the modern condition. It is in this sense that realism may be a measure of (literary) excess in which *industrial* modernity is decided. After all, with its focus on narrative genres, realism anticipates precisely the "unprecedented transformation of narration into theory" that Shoshana Felman associates with Freud's psychoanalysis, invested as psychoanalysis is in figuring out modern rationality.

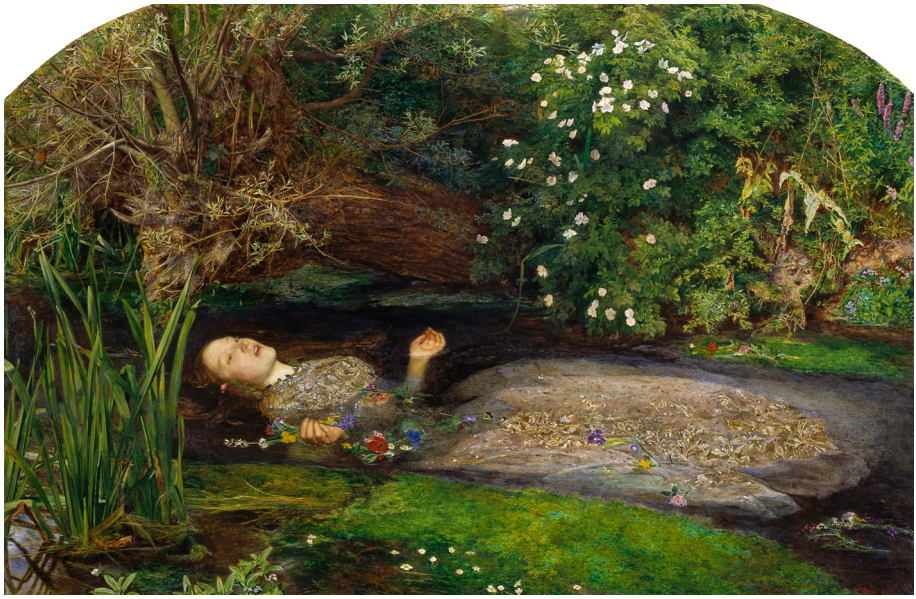


Figure 1. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia* (source: Wikipedia)

1 See Benjamin 163.

These different concerns converge in John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (fig. 1), a painting that came to exemplify the Pre-Raphaelite *truth to nature* to the Victorians in the early 1850s, at the time when the Pre-Raphaelites provoked Charles Dickens and John Ruskin, the champions of Victorian modernity, to lock horns over the meaning of realism.[2] What interests me about Millais's *Ophelia* is not only its realism, but also how its realism is informed by the structures of mourning, with Ophelia taking over from Hamlet as a figure where mourning and melancholia are negotiated in Victorian modernity. I argue that Ophelia may well be a figure where the unresolved narrative conditions of Antigone are retained in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as well as the political concerns that are implicit to Antigone's mourning. Indeed, Millais foregrounds the Antigonic aspect of Ophelia in his painting, as if to suggest that Ophelia Antigonized is how to figure out both the truth of realism and the politics of industrial modernity.

In order to unpack this configuration, I first turn to Carl Schmitt's reading of *Hamlet*; for Schmitt, Hamlet is a means of negotiating the literary excess of early modernity into political excess, or perhaps into pure politics. A comment on the Industrial Revolution reveals, however, an unsuspected Antigonic aspect to Schmitt's *Hamlet* and to his political theory, in which modernity opens up to further investigation.

Hamlet and Industrial Modernity

Drawing on Benjamin, Schmitt argues for an exceptional status of *Hamlet* in the ideation of modernity. In *Hamlet or Hecuba*, he identifies Shakespeare's play as a specimen story of modern revolutions; according to Schmitt (54, 56), *Hamlet* is the first stage of the English Revolution in the seventeenth century, the English Revolution being how the interpellation of political modernity took place. Schmitt explains the exceptional status of *Hamlet* in part by the fact that revenge in this play is emphatically inflected in reflection, so

2 For the concept of realism in the 1850s, see Brooks 71–72.

that the embryonic modern sense of authority, and of politics, takes shape in this inflection. In his words, *Hamlet* "enticed those in positions of authority into a continuous examination of their conscience that led to the loss of the capacity to rule" (72). While Schmitt (21, 24) calls this the Hamletization of revenge, what seems to be at stake is the Hamletization of authority in modernity, and of modern governance, so that the idea itself of modern politics appears to be encoded from within the process of Hamletization, with Hamletization as "a vehicle of modernization" (Leonard 202).

Insofar as Hamletization entails the structures of mourning, this means that modern authority is inextricably bound with mourning and melancholia. After all, *Hamlet* is an exemplary *mourning* play, and Schmitt describes Hamletization as the transformation of the figure of the avenger into a reflective, self-conscious melancholic (Honig 147; Leonard 202). For Schmitt, mourning and melancholia thus become an index of modern *psychopolitics*, to borrow a term from Peter Sloterdijk (2010), just as modernity is thereby identified as a psychopolitical excess. As Carsten Strathausen notes in an essay on *Hamlet or Hecuba*, what "'stands behind' Hamlet's melancholy is . . . the monumental dawn of the entire modern era as such" (19). This further implies that mourning and melancholia in modernity cannot be accessed except as psychopolitics – that, in modernity, there may be an immovable political excess to mourning and melancholia. Cathy Caruth suggests as much when she identifies "an anticipation of Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia" in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, after having identified Locke's empiricist philosophy as political theory. In Caruth's words, "what seems at first a straightforward observation of sensory mechanisms becomes more like an anxious story of a precariously governed state" (12, 34). If this means that Hamletization informs not only the English Revolution, strictly speaking, but also philosophy and political theory in its wake, it also suggests that Freud's psychoanalysis, in part at least, is an exercise in Hamletization.

Finally, by arguing for the preeminence of *Hamlet*, Schmitt, like Benjamin, implies that literature, not philosophy or theology, is where the ideation of modern authority finds its point of departure. Miriam Leonard notes that, "[i]n self-consciously locating the meaning of *Hamlet* in its concrete historical setting, Schmitt was making an appeal for the repoliticization of literary analysis" (197); Carlo Galli observes that "Schmitt self-consciously exposes himself to the accusation of effecting a *contaminatio* between art and politics" (65). David Pan writes that Schmitt's "interest is not just in literary critical issues but also in the reasons that literature is inseparable from politics" (732). This means that in modernity there may be a political excess to literature too, and not only for Schmitt, by which literature itself is confirmed and exceeded (hence, perhaps, the obsessive concern with artistic autonomy in modern literary and critical theory).

That the Industrial Revolution was indebted to this constellation, and to Hamletization, can be inferred from Schmitt's comment that England of the English Revolution later became "the country of origin of the industrial revolution, without having to pass through the straights of Continental statehood" (55–56): it was the country that "did not set up a state police, justice, finance or standing army in the way Continental Europe did" (56). Schmitt implies that the Industrial Revolution resulted from a systemic revolutionary character that England retained between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries; he suggests that the Industrial Revolution began as political, adopting and furthering the language of Hamletization. That no less than modernity was at stake can be inferred from a comment by Eric L. Santner, that Schmitt's early modern England "was . . . *prematurely developed*, historically more advanced, already moving beyond the order of territorial states that defined the politics of the Continental powers" (155). Santner alludes here also to Schmitt's earlier research, in *Land and Sea*, where the focus was not only on the English Revolution but also on England's espousal of sea over land: Schmitt's revolutionary England progressing "from one order of deterritorialization to another, even more radical one that shifted the center of gravity of

political power *from land to sea*" (155–56). Even so, as Strathausen notes, the shift from land to sea too was "concentrated on the side of revolution" (20), contributing to the transformation of the world that was eventually fully effected by the Industrial Revolution. It is almost as if England's shift from land to sea was a stepping stone between the English and Industrial Revolutions, opening the world itself to revolutionary transformation.[3]

By this account, the Industrial Revolution was truly a revolution worthy of its name: not because it dovetailed with the English Revolution, but because it transformed the very conditions of and for the revolution in the modern *world*. As Christoph Menke notes, "what the revolution primarily transforms . . . is how historical transformation is enforced. The revolution transforms transformation" (321). The Industrial Revolution kept refracting the conditions of the other revolutions that shaped the political profile of the long nineteenth century: the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution. When Eric Hobsbawm (1996) argues for the Dual Revolution as a concept that explains the historical logic of the nineteenth century – the Dual Revolution designating a coming together, in the nineteenth century, of the Industrial Revolution and the legacy of the French

3 That Schmitt was critical of industrialization (pointedly so in *Land and Sea*) is a staple of Schmitt scholarship. See Meierhenrich and Simons 41; Bendersky 128, 142; Teschke 395; Simons 780–81. Hence the special importance of his claim in *Hamlet and Hecuba*, that the Industrial Revolution proceeds from seventeenth-century English sovereignty, given that seventeenth-century England had a lasting fascination for Schmitt and in many ways remained a cornerstone of his political thought. Admitting the Industrial Revolution to this fascination constitutes a rupture in Schmitt's political theory – a rupture comparable to the historical intrusion (*Einbruch*) that he identifies in *Hamlet* and associates with the inception of modernity. The Industrial Revolution in *Hamlet and Hecuba* was therefore how Schmitt's political theory was itself subjected to Hamletization. Pan, for instance, comments that "Schmitt seems to forget his own pronouncements about the primacy of the political . . . when he refers to the new order as the one of maritime existence and the Industrial Revolution" (748). Rather than an instance of forgetting, however, the Industrial Revolution seems to be an instance of Hamletization in the very theory whose aim is to explain Hamletization.

Revolution – he assigns a similar value to the Industrial Revolution, implying that the transformation brought forward by the French Revolution does not suffice to explain the structure of nineteenth-century modernity.

Truth to Nature and Pathetic Fallacy

A Victorian *Hamlet* that came closest perhaps to probing this juncture was *Ophelia* (1851–2), a painting by John Everett Millais. It was at this time that the Pre-Raphaelites, having vocally adopted "truth to nature" as their creed, provoked a heated debate among the Victorians not merely about the exact meaning and function of realism in literature and art, but about realism that – in targeting nature – targeted actually the ongoing transformation of the world in the Industrial Revolution. The question that informed the Pre-Raphaelite creed, therefore, was this: What constitutes truth to nature if nature is predicated on transformation? The Pre-Raphaelite *nature* was in fact *true* only to the modern world engaged in its totality by the Industrial Revolution: the totality also to do with the fact that the industrial transformation coincided with the intellectual breakthroughs of Victorian geology, with its emphasis on the ongoing *planetary* transformation. Victorian modernity, in other words, was acutely paleotechnic, to paraphrase Lewis Mumford (1934).

As a painting that opened in exhibitions, a matter of public display, Millais's *Ophelia* coincided conveniently with the Great Exhibition of 1851, itself a vehicle of the modern world engaged in radical transformation. The name of the exhibition was the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, a historic event whose ambition was not merely to represent the world as industrial in its totality, but also to testify to a truth implicit to this world. The Exhibition was housed in the novel architecture of the Crystal Palace, as if to suggest that Victorian exhibition areas came to replace, in the nineteenth century, the theatrical spectacularity of early modernity. Fittingly, the Crystal Palace entertained the idea of industrial architecture and accommodated an appropriate sense of transformative thermodynamics: *The Times*

reported on "the bright hot sun shining on its ribs and sides," so that "[t]he heat of the sun, acting on the moist ground, produced a fluctuating haze or mist, through which the procession appeared in the same shifting uncertain light that you see in the magic lantern, and added an air of unreality to the scene" (I. Armstrong, *Victorian* 142). That realism was negotiated in the process can be inferred from the fact that "an air of unreality" occasioned by the scene was quickly explained by *The Times* as the reality of the ground and the heat that were being redistributed in the new architecture, suggesting that no less than a truth of realism was vested in this (paleotechnic, metonymic) redistribution.

The tone of the debate about the Pre-Raphaelite *truth to nature* was set by Charles Dickens and John Ruskin; the debate took place mostly in *Household Words* and *The Times*, in 1850 and 1851. Of course, a more general truth of Victorian modernity was canvassed in this discussion, insofar as Dickens and Ruskin were instrumental to Victorian self-reflection in the mid-century – as instrumental as the Great Exhibition, the Crystal Palace, or *The Times* and *Household Words*. The discussion was triggered by a painting Millais had exhibited earlier at the Royal Academy, *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849–50), so that *Ophelia*, painted by Millais in the immediate aftermath of the debate, could be considered Millais's response to the argument. Tim Barringer (61) reports that, following the publication of Ruskin's letter in *The Times* in 1851, Millais made contact with Ruskin and, his "resolve redoubled by meeting the critic," began painting *Ophelia* from nature in Surrey later that summer. In many ways, *Ophelia* was how Millais unpacked his early *Christ*, so that his *Christ* was redistributed in *Ophelia* as heat and the ground were redistributed in the Crystal Palace.[4]

4 Schmitt (68) argues that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* occasioned a similar unpacking in seventeenth-century England, where the Reformation was "unlike any other" in continental Europe, resulting in the "atomization of institutional religion alongside a growing skepticism," with no Counter-Reformation in tow.

Dickens initiated the debate in 1850 by furiously attacking human form in Millais's Pre-Raphaelite "contemplation of a Holy Family" (265). For Dickens, "[w]herever it is possible to express ugliness of feature, limb, or attitude, you have it expressed" (266), the Millais bodies so vile that Dickens qualifies them as hallucination. Millais's painting engages "the lowest depths of what is mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting" (265); Millais's Christ is "a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-headed boy" and Mary is "so horrible in her ugliness, that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a Monster" (265). This is why Millais's painting, even with its realism of detail, both animate and inanimate, fails for Dickens in terms of realism – because these details, taken together, demonstrate the "perversity of mankind" (266); instead, human form should receive its coherence from being "the expression of the human face divine on Earth" (265). Once this rationale is taken to pieces, as Millais takes it to pieces, realism gives way to what Dickens describes as perversity and hallucination.

When Dickens specifies the rationale of realism to be "the expression of the human face divine on Earth," he actually defines realism in terms of substitution and identification, as metaphor; indeed, truth to nature, or the truth of realism, resides according to Dickens in the "pure spiritual condition" (265) of humanity. What offends him about Millais, then, is that this very rationale is dismantled into a metonymic grouping of detail – that the rationality of metaphor is taken to pieces and subjected to metonymic transformation. Isobel Armstrong alludes to the metonymic imperative of Pre-Raphaelite realism when she notes that the Pre-Raphaelite detail "did not necessarily mean 'microscopic' detail, an element that Ruskin introduced into the debate in what was actually a critique of Millais . . . . It *did* mean sensuous plenitude" ("The Pre-Raphaelites" 21). Similarly, Julie F. Codell quotes the Pre-Raphaelites, saying, "It is simply fuller Nature we want" ("Empiricism" 125). Roland Barthes (40) explains this particular condition of realism as the "metonymic confusion" of "the bourgeois sign" in the nineteenth century. When Dickens

describes Pre-Raphaelite realism as perversion and hallucination, he seems to address precisely that which Barthes qualifies as confusion, but pointedly in terms of psychopathology – just as metonymy is thereby earmarked by Dickens for psychic disorder.

In turn, Dickens's response to the Pre-Raphaelites could be described as hysterical, suggesting that hysteria coincides with a sudden, unexpected loss of metaphor, which is replaced by metonymy. (Sigmund Freud was a great reader of Dickens. Regenia Gagnier reports that *David Copperfield* "was Freud's favorite novel" [221].) Interestingly, the same structure dominates *Hard Times* (1854), Dickens's industrial novel and his most vocal critique of the Industrial Revolution. Catherine Gallagher summarizes the novel as "the unmaking of a metaphor," noting that "[t]he strength of the dissociative tendency" in *Hard Times* "is partly due to the fact that Dickens uses metaphor to connect his plots" (149). According to Gallagher, Dickens's industrial novel "questions the very enterprise of making metaphors in a world where connections, when they are possible, are almost always destructive" (149). If this is to say that the industrial novel, for Dickens, does to the novel what the Industrial Revolution does to the world, this is also to say that the Pre-Raphaelite *truth to nature* corresponds to the truth of the Victorian *industrial* novel: *Hard Times* summarizing, in narrative terms, what began for Dickens as a critique of Pre-Raphaelitism.[5]

5 This may also explain why Dickens was dissatisfied with Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, an industrial novel he commissioned for serialized publication in *Household Words* right after *Hard Times* had been serialized in the same publication. Gallagher remarks that Gaskell favors metonymy and that the principal characters in Gaskell's novel "use, discuss, and ultimately discard the metaphor that Dickens had used, however ambiguously, at the center of his novel" and "repeatedly apologize for arguing analogically," blaming "one another for introducing metaphor" (167). Symptomatically, in a note to his managing editor at *Household Words*, in October 1854, Dickens echoes his 1850 critique of Millais's metonymic bodies: "Mrs. Gaskell's story, so divided, is wearisome in the last degree . . . . [T]hus wire-drawn it is a dreary business" (Gallagher 166–67).

In his letter to *The Times* of 14 May 1851, Ruskin confronts the anti-Pre-Raphaelite diatribes. He begins by noting that the Pre-Raphaelites are faithful "to a certain order of truth," to be found in the time-consuming toil they invest in the representation of the minute details of the natural world; it is for this reason, he says, that the Pre-Raphaelites ought at once to be placed "above the level of mere contempt" (Hares-Stryker 101). Like Dickens, Ruskin seizes on detail to describe the Pre-Raphaelites. It is only that detail for Ruskin, instead of perverting the truth and realism, is their foothold, by binding onto itself self-absorbing labor that alone defines humanity. Indeed, instead of focusing on human form, Ruskin focuses on the representation of plants in Pre-Raphaelite paintings, a "botanical study" he finds "invaluable" in terms of "truth as well as feeling" (Hares-Stryker 102). If that is to say that truth and realism entail a metonymic order for Ruskin, insofar as dedication to detail entails an acute relation of a self to what Sami Khatib calls "a non-identical reality" (Eşanu 79), that is also to say that Ruskin's perspective on the Pre-Raphaelites as workmen is of a piece with the representation of work in the Victorian industrial novel, above all by Elizabeth Gaskell: in both cases humanity is claimed for a revolutionary transformation, whose logic is metonymic, not metaphorical.[6] (Incidentally, Ruskin thought *Hard Times* "the finest of Dickens's novels," a fact highlighted by Peter Brooks [52] in his book on realist vision.) It is in this sense that Ruskin proposes a different philology for the Pre-Raphaelites, one based in metonymy, whereas Dickens adheres to metaphor. Likewise, their philosophical affinities are different: where Dickens identifies proto-Freudian perversion in the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin argues for a Humean, empiricist sympathy. It follows that Ruskin engages humanity relationally, not conceptually – metonymically, not metaphorically – as a function of sympathy, not subject to perversion.

Ruskin's critique of the Industrial Revolution is consistent with his perspective on the Pre-Raphaelites. Ruskin perceives art history to be part

6 See Smith (26–28) about Ruskin's "mistrust of metaphor."

of restless critical work, in close contact with discourses of Victorian political economy and geology. Gillian Beer quotes Thomas Carlyle to that effect, who "wrote that Ruskin 'twisted . . . geology into morality, theology, Egyptian mythology, with fiery cuts at political economy'" (41); Mumford identifies Ruskin as "the fundamental economist of the biotechnic order," as well as a "paleotect" (*The Culture* 542, *Technics* 185). Languages and disciplines combine in Ruskin's writings into a metonymic rationality, in a process that corresponds to relational and paratactic bodies in Pre-Raphaelite paintings. It is a rationality that finds its extreme image in Ruskin's 1884 lectures on the storm-cloud of the nineteenth century, where Ruskin analyzes the Earth itself, with its coal and ore, as it metonymizes into paratactic particles of dust, smoke, filth, "dense manufacturing mist" ("The Storm-Cloud" 26). (The industrial novel mobilizes the same image; Gaskell notes in 1854 that factory chimneys "are constantly sending out one-third of their coal" [82].) The world caught in the industrial transformation is thus matched by the planet caught in a chthonic irruption, to which selves find it increasingly difficult to respond with semi-protective insides. This is why the industrial world presupposes a measure of melancholia: because the self in this world is increasingly ceded and lost to it.

Ruskin equipped this particular melancholia with a theory as early as the third volume of *Modern Painters*, in 1856, when he outlined the concept of pathetic fallacy (*Modern* 166–83). Ruskin identifies pathetic fallacy in attempts, mostly literary, to relate to nature in terms of identification and substitution, metaphorically that is, with a self that is reinforced by this process rather than ceded to the natural world. Instead, he argues that nature should be engaged relationally, not conceptually, just as modern mimesis needs to take into account this relational imperative (one we could describe as metonymic). It is therefore as early as pathetic fallacy and long before the storm-cloud lectures that Ruskin cultivates "a distinctly ecological philology," as Jesse Oak Taylor calls it (5). It is a philology that harbors a nascent metonymic theory of realism; George Levine describes realism precisely as "a sympathet-

ic and empathic relation" to "the not-self" (viii). Also, *pathetic* suggests that this fallacy and philology entail a psychopolitics, and that Ruskin engages the Victorian world on psychopolitical terms. In fact, pathetic fallacy could well be describing Freudian hysteria, insofar as hysteria resides in successful – albeit unceasing – attempts to retrieve metaphor as a measure of the self; on the other hand, the metonymic line that Ruskin is taking invokes sympathy as its underlying psychopolitics, with melancholia as its resident pathology.[7]

Freud will acknowledge that there is an order of truth to this metonymic imperative, and to this pathology, when he observes that melancholic persons have "a keener eye for the truth than other people who are not melancholic," because they see the self for what it is: "petty, egoistic, dishonest, lacking in independence, one whose sole aim has been to hide the weaknesses of his own nature" (246). Additionally, Freud attaches a measure of psychopolitics to melancholia when he remarks that "[i]n mourning it is *the world* which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (246, emphasis added). Interestingly, in that same section of "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud claims Hamlet for the truth he assigns to melancholia, even though he earlier analyzed Hamlet as an instance of hysteria. Indeed, *Hamlet* may be how mourning opens up in Freud's psychoanalysis as an intellectual interval between hysteria and melancholia, psychoanalysis itself an instance of Hamletization.[8]

---

7 In the words of Gilles Deleuze, sympathy is "not a vague feeling of respect or of spiritual participation: on the contrary, it is the exertion or the penetration of bodies," where bodies "may be physical, biological, psychic, social, verbal" (Deleuze and Parnet 52). That sympathy thus imagined entails a measure of pathology, even today, can be inferred from a comment by Oak Taylor, that "[a]ny consideration of *The Storm-Cloud in the Nineteenth Century* as an account of climate change must begin by acknowledging that Ruskin's original audience thought he was crazy" (8).

8 Ernest Jones explored this interval in *Hamlet and Oedipus* (67–68).

Ophelia was Millais's immediate response to the mid-Victorian debate about realism; over time the painting came to exemplify Pre-Raphaelite poetics, but also Victorian modernity. In a book about the afterlives of Ophelia, it has been noted that "Millais's Pre-Raphaelite Ophelia . . . has accrued so high a degree of cultural authority" that "[t]he Millais painting of Ophelia, rather than the figure herself, has more recently become the impetus for artists' statements about the nature of art" (Peterson and Williams 3–4). If that means that *Ophelia* has succeeded, and derailed, *Hamlet* as a linchpin of Hamletization, it also suggests that realism in the nineteenth century was ultimately an index of Hamletization and entailed a distinct modern psychopolitics.

Tellingly, in Millais's painting the figure of Hamlet is sidestepped for Ophelia to take over as a vehicle of Hamletization. Millais's field of vision is sharply defined by the horizontal figure of Ophelia as she is drowning, half-submerged in the stream and framed by the Ruskinian dense flora of the river bank. This event is not staged in the play but is reported by Gertrude, having taken place off-stage: Gertrude narrates to others how Ophelia sang while afloat, "mermaid-like," surrounded by her "fantastic garlands" and "her coronet weeds," until pulled "from her melodious lay/ To muddy death" (IV. vii, Shakespeare 113). With Gertrude as narrator, Ophelia's suicide is not elided or repressed by the play, but is relegated to a narrative report that impedes the theatrical vision as a kind of narrative overkill and anticipates the language of the novel. Ophelia thus becomes the play's own *homo sacer*: she is killed off in the play, like so many others in *Hamlet*, but her death is not admitted to the theatrical order (only to the order of the narrative), which is how she delimits the concept of theatricality and comes to constitute a theatrical state of exception. Millais, that is, shifts focus to that which the play consigns to the status of theatrical junk, refuse, even pollution, only to identify this junk as the play's state of exception and Ophelia as *homo sacer*. It is in this sense that Ophelia emerges as an exemplary political figure in *Hamlet*, more

exemplary than Hamlet himself. Victorian painting may have inherited this condition from early modern theater: Victorian painters rarely chose to show the instant of Ophelia's death, even though "images of Ophelia were shown more often at the Royal Academy between 1800 and 1900 than depictions of any other Shakespearean heroine" (Rhodes 43).[9]

Ophelia is consistently a *homo sacer* in Shakespeare's play: while her suicide should place her within criminality by early modern standards, the particulars of her burial indicate that her death is stuck between crime and non-crime, just as dead Ophelia falls forever short of constituting proper sacrifice. When Hamlet and Laertes finally claim her death as meaningful, they do it improperly and belatedly, which is how her burial and her possible sacrificial future are both disrupted. Additionally, Ophelia is how a limit to Hamlet's madness is imagined, as well as a limit to the play's rationality: when Laertes describes Ophelia as a "document in madness" (IV.v, Shakespeare 104), another order of madness is introduced into the play, an exception to that which the play espouses as theatrical madness and therefore as theatrical reason. When Laertes describes Ophelia's madness as documentary, it is almost as if realism is anticipated in *Hamlet*, precisely as a state of exception to a theatrical order of truth.

Finally, Ophelia may be a *homo sacer* to what modernity itself imagines as its reason. A detail from Millais's letter dated 16 December 1852 sheds light on this proposition: Millais comments on the success of an exhibition to which he sent *Ophelia*, where he "lost only by some few votes the prize given to Ward's 'Charlotte Corday Going to the Execution'" (Millais 189). It is not only that Ophelia is aligned with Charlotte Corday, the murderess of Jean-

9 According to Giorgio Agamben (1998), *homo sacer* – a figure he traces back to early Roman law – denotes a human life that can be taken without the murder constituting crime or sacrifice. Agamben identifies *homo sacer* as an exemplary figure of political modernity, precisely in order to expand on Schmitt's political theory that finds its explanatory text in *Hamlet*.

Paul Marat, as if no truly functional distinction persisted – by the mid-nineteenth century – between the story of *Hamlet* and the history of the French Revolution. It is also that the deaths of Ophelia and Corday evidently serve to revolutionize fully the deaths of Hamlet and Marat. If modern revolutions are predicated on the state of exception, as Giorgio Agamben argues, the deaths of Ophelia and Corday, thus aligned, suggest that the deaths of Hamlet and Marat may not be enough for revolution or, perhaps, that the deaths of Hamlet and Marat may be too much for how revolutions engage *homo sacer* and the state of exception.

Ophelia as a Focalizing Consciousness

In a sense, Millais's *Ophelia* contributed to the nascent modern narrative theory that found its preeminent author in Henry James: cast as the play's *homo sacer*, whose death is of narrative order but not of theatrical order, Ophelia suggests that *narrative* is bare life of the theatrical order of truth, which threatens this order with an ever-imminent state of exception.

Shakespeare supports this claim by granting Ophelia a peculiar narrative voice to go with the suicide: it is a voice unvoiced but reported, where bare life is negotiated as a *narrative* limit. Ophelia's suicidal voice is precisely what Hamlet's voice in soliloquies is not, most conspicuously when the soliloquy is about suicide, as in "To be or not to be . . . ." If this is how Ophelia diverges from what will become a first-person narrator in the *Bildungsroman*, this may be how she heralds the instance of the focalizing consciousness in the nineteenth-century novel: the focalizing consciousness denoting the voice and the mind where the boundary breaks between the self and the story, between the narrator and the character, to be replaced by a network of unresolved metonymic relationships. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that "[f]rom the Restoration until the end of the nineteenth century Gertrude's monologue . . . was truncated for performance so that the lines of the speech that explicitly describe the act of drowning, beginning with 'Her clothes spread wide,' were omitted" (Rhodes 44). This suggests that the novel, with its in-

vention of the focalizing consciousness in the nineteenth century, may have picked up on Ophelia, not on Hamlet, as a figure where a narrative state of exception finds articulation – in the works by Austen, Gaskell, James. . . Not to mention the fact that a full-scale invention of the focalizing consciousness, in Austen's novels, coincides historically with industrial modernity, and that the Victorian novel is often understood "as the culmination of a tradition that was part and parcel of the modernization process itself" (N. Armstrong 6).

By granting focus to the off-stage Ophelia, Millais explores the visual imaginary that is implicit to the focalizing consciousness, his Ophelia a comment on how the nineteenth-century *novel* engages and redistributes visibility and visuality, and anticipates narrative cinema.[10] It is a visibility to which the theatrical demands are no longer essential. Just as the focalizing consciousness is split between a narrative self and the story (this split being where subjectivation takes place without functional closure), Millais's Ophelia is granted focus only at the expense of a measure of disintegration. She is focal to Millais, but there is no focus to her figure: she is loosely assembled around a face and a half-submerged neck, her hair given up to water, her hands disjointed from the rest of the body, in a dress that could be mistaken for a rock protruding from the stream. She is not a figure so much as a configuration, an assemblage, whose logic is metonymic and syntactical. Shakespeare himself describes Ophelia's suicidal voice in pointedly metonymic terms, as *her melodious lay*. *Melodious lay* means that Ophelia's voice, as she is dying, comes across as a metonymic web: it is not a voice so much as an uncontained resonance chamber, in which the voice becomes inseparable from its surroundings – very much the condition of the focalizing consciousness in the nineteenth-century novel. *Melodious lay* is further made part of yet another metonymic arrangement: it entails a *muddy death*. Shakespeare reinforces metonymic contiguity of the two by the assonance into which *melodious lay*

10 For narrative focalization in visual terms see Bal ("Myth" and "Narration"); Miller 124–25; Fludernik.

and *muddy death* are brought together (melodious lay – muddy death), assonance meaning precisely a grouping of sound that is based in metonymy and parataxis. This implies that anomic suicide begins in Shakespeare's language where voice as grammar is given up for voice as syntax and parataxis, and where metaphor is given up for metonymy; this also implies that the focalizing consciousness begins in the language of the novel in the position that Shakespeare assigns to anomic suicide.[11]

In addition, Millais dismantled himself as painter into the elements of the focalizing consciousness. While his contemporaries judged *Ophelia* to be "wonderfully like" Elizabeth Siddal, who sat for Millais for the painting, on her way to becoming a tragic Pre-Raphaelite icon, the painting is also an unexpected self-portrait, Ophelia's features resonating strikingly with the facial features of young Millais in contemporary photographs. Millais himself alludes to his affinity with Ophelia, however jokingly, in his letters from Surrey in the summer of 1851. He reports himself on the verge of being transformed into Ophelia: "am. . . in danger of being blown by the wind into the water, and becoming intimate with the feelings of Ophelia when that lady sank to muddy death, together with the (less likely) total disappearance, through the voracity of the flies" (Millais 119). Also, it is worth noting that *Ophelia* provided a script for the subsequent biography of Elizabeth Siddal: Siddal seems "to have become so obsessed with the representations for which she sat as model, 'to have decided to live – and die – a fiction'" (Bronfen 168); Pre-Raphaelite apocrypha consistently flirt with the assumption of Siddal's suicide in 1862, as if in the wake of *Ophelia*. This all but completes a cross-contamination of Millais and Siddal in Ophelia and, consequently, a radical decomposition of self in Victorian portraiture – composition, quite literally, given up for

11 Like metonymy, parataxis favors proximity over substitution, and is mobilized around words, phrases and narrative units added on rather than subordinated. See Auerbach 11–12, Said x. It is for this reason that parataxis is not at odds with syntax as is sometimes argued, but rather engages syntax as a kind of conceptual limit. In Heidegger's words, "we certainly do not take parataxis to mean not-yet-syntactic" (186).

decomposition. Finally, just as Ophelia's grave was disrupted so that Hamlet could finalize the story of the play, Siddal's grave was eventually disrupted so that Dante Gabriel Rossetti could retrieve, for publication, the poems he had buried with Siddal: Rossetti's way of conflating *melodious lay* with *muddy death*.[12]

Like Ophelia, the Millais of *Ophelia* was therefore no longer a figure so much as a configuration, an assemblage in which the artist, the model and the subject were given up for a metonymic network. The idea of self/portrait was deployed in *Ophelia* only to be taken apart into a visual syntax consistent with the focalizing consciousness in the nineteenth-century novel. By extension, the focalizing consciousness is revealed to entail a decomposition of self: the focalizing consciousness seems stuck in a mourning that cannot forget melancholia as its limit. It is in this sense that the focalizing consciousness is also a comment on the first-person narrator of the great nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*: in Freudian terms, the first-person narrator of the Victorian *Bildungsroman* begins as no longer a mourner (this may be why narrators in Victorian *Bildungsromans* are always hysterical to an extent). Lastly: if these are the terms on which Millais claims for himself the story of Ophelia (and himself for the focalizing consciousness), this is also how his painting becomes a site of narrative radicalization and narrative autochthony.[13]

---

12 See Gates (149–50) for Siddal's conflation of her poetic voice with the voice of the drowning Ophelia (especially in "A Year and a Day," a poem Siddal wrote in 1855). See also Rhodes 62–63; Jukić, *Zazor* 115–16. See Millais (144) for Ophelia as a portrait of Siddal. Julie F. Codell ("Painting" 347) argues that Millais experimented with fusing portrait, self-portrait and narrative painting as early as *Lorenzo and Isabella* (1848). Effie Gray, Millais's future wife, detected a similar procedure in *The Eve of St Agnes*, an 1854 drawing Millais based on the eponymous poem by Alfred Tennyson: in a letter to her mother she wrote that "[t]he Saint's face looking out on the snow with the mouth opened and dying-looking is exactly like Millais'" (Rose 44).

13 Isobel Armstrong credits Millais with a narrative grasp of literature: the Pre-Raphaelite group, according to Armstrong, fractured "into three forms of the literary – symbol (Hunt), narrative (Millais) and the icon that fuses meaning and materiality (Rossetti)" ("The Pre-Raphaelites" 23). Andrew Sanders (77) suggests the same when he notes that Millais admired poetry primarily for the narrative, not for lyricism. Apart from fully developing

Ophelia's Chthonic Condition

In *Ophelia*, Millais adopted a visual format that corresponds to the focalizing consciousness by radically foregrounding the scene, so much so that the idea of background is compromised. It is as if the grammar of the painting has been cancelled in favor of its syntax; Paul Barlow describes it as "a painting built from a dense network of interlinking lines, tones and hues" (141). The many details are all foregrounded and knit closely into a claustrophilic parataxis: the reeds, the willow, the robin, the dog roses, the nettles, the forget-me-nots, the purple loosestrife, the violets around Ophelia's neck, the poppies in the stream along with irises, pansies, crowfoot, hyacinths, daisies, cornflowers . . . , Ophelia's dress and body undone into a paratactic structure. Charles Darwin may have provided the best description of Millais's procedure when he insisted on "an entangled bank" as his preferred site of contemplation, in *On the Origin of Species* (59, 360). If this is to say that Millais's *Ophelia* may be a Darwinian entangled bank *avant la lettre*, this also implies that Darwin's entangled bank, as well as the contemplation that informs Darwin's biology, are configured metonymically and paratactically, like *Ophelia*, compromising equally the idea of background and metaphor as an intellectual situation.

In short, what happens in Victorian *Ophelia* is that *Hamlet*'s theatrical

---

the focalizing consciousness, Austen also anticipated the intimacy between the idea of portrait and the focalizing consciousness, most consistently in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). The education of Elizabeth Bennet, the novel's focalizing consciousness, climaxes in an ekphrastic moment: when Elizabeth contemplates Mr. Darcy's portrait in his family gallery. It is only when she sees his portrait that she realizes that, with all her excessive intelligence, she is insufficient to hold the narrative together unless she acknowledges that her focalizing self is refracted in his image. In turn, the Darcy of the portrait reciprocates the structure of the focalizing consciousness: like the focalizing consciousness, Darcy of the portrait is split between the character in the novel and a self in the pictorial regime, but is reducible to neither. Put otherwise, Darcy's portrait confronts Elizabeth with the conditions of her own focalizing self: her self being to the novel what Darcy is to her. Finally, this may be how Austen defines subjectivity and subjectivation: as a withdrawal of the focalizing consciousness from presumption to narrative control.

junk is reclaimed for the foreground, radically narrativized, and mobilized as the intellectual limit of bare life. This is also how junk is claimed for the state of exception, now as an excess of immanence in industrial modernity – just as narrative could be identified as an excess of immanence within the theatrical order of *Hamlet*.[14] Ophelia herself is junk, and emphatically so in Millais's painting: she is caught as she is beginning to rot, her body polluting the stream, a fitting metonymy to Hamlet's early metaphor about *something* being rotten in the state of Denmark. After all, the first gravedigger identifies water as "a sore decayer" while digging Ophelia's grave (V.i, Shakespeare 118); water as the element of Ophelia's suicide and earth as the element of her grave are thus assembled into a metonymy of rotting. This is consistent with the image of "muddy death" in Gertrude's report and Millais's painting. This is also consistent with the narrative fact that Ophelia is junk to begin with: Ophelia is where sexual reproduction is cancelled most pointedly in the play, Hamlet marking her out for a nunnery. The same applies to Hamlet's identifying Ophelia as metal. Describing her as "metal more attractive" (III. ii, Shakespeare 68), Hamlet alludes both to Ophelia's magnetic attraction, as iron ore is magnetic, and to her sexual invalidity: because only lines later he identifies a *nothing* between her legs. Elaine Showalter senses an acute contiguity of this Ophelia and Millais's painting when she notes that "the painting has such a hard surface, strangely flattened perspective, and brilliant light that it seems cruelly indifferent to the woman's death" (85). Finally, Millais's *Ophelia* is consistent with the stakes of the Industrial Revolution: industrial modernity is precisely about how production and reproduction are reconceived, away from sexuality, kinship and metaphor, and into a network of metonymic and chthonic interventions. Millais points to Ophelia as an index of this transformation, which is suspended in *Hamlet* between the (political) *something* and the (sexual) *nothing* – in theatrical, political, and sexual terms, Ophelia is the play's dross or slag. This is equally so from the point of view of

14 See Santner (xxi) for the excess of immanence that defines nineteenth-century modernity, in the wake of the French Revolution.

psychoanalysis: as a disposable figure of Hamlet's desire (an exemplary Lacanian object *a*), Ophelia receives her psychoanalytic sanction from being wasted – from becoming sexual junk, dross, slag.[15]

Millais's chthonic Ophelia is also a comment on mourning as a template of modern psychopolitics: it takes Ophelia to show why Hamlet would be an example of functional, normalizing mourning, just as it takes Ophelia to show why melancholia – not mourning – is in fact revolutionary. As a figure of melancholia, Ophelia threatens Hamlet, so that his mourning ultimately emerges as a functional response to the demands of melancholia that forever unsettle modern subjectivation. In terms of Hamletization, Ophelia may be to Hamlet what melancholia is to mourning in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia." Indeed, when Freud compares mourning to melancholia, melancholia comes across as the polluting, pathological junk of the world that the ego has failed to process to its advantage, so much so that the ego can no longer sustain itself. With Freud's emphasis on the ego as a work-station and on the world as the potentially menacing junk, there is an industrial edge to melancholia thus imagined. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Freud distinguishes between the work of mourning and the work of melancholia in economic and industrial terms: the work of mourning is productive, while the work of melancholia is not.[16] Even as a literary work-station, Oph-

15 In Jacques Lacan's words, "only insofar as the object of Hamlet's desire has become an impossible object can it become once more the object of his desire" ("Desire" 36). Put otherwise: it takes a rotting Ophelia, to be buried, Ophelia as junk, for Ophelia to become fully functional to Hamlet's order of truth. To be sure, Lacan, like Jones before him, warns that *nunnery* was also a reference to brothel at the time. See Lacan ("Desire" 23) and Jones (86). In the final analysis, however, a conflation of brothel and nunnery only means that Ophelia's sexuality is signally processed into junk.

16 See Freud (244–45, 252–53, 255, 257–58) for phrases like "the work of mourning," "the work of melancholia," "the work which mourning performs" and "the economics of pain." See also Derrida (2006) for mourning imagined as work, specifically in relation to nineteenth-century modernity and to *Hamlet* as its specimen story. According to Derrida, "mourning is not one kind of work among others. It is work itself, work in general, the trait by means of which one ought perhaps to reconsider the very concept of production" (121).

elia does melancholia in the positions where Hamlet does mourning (and anticipates hysteria): where he is an accomplished dramatist, producing *The Mousetrap* and stringing blank-verse soliloquies, she sings mad little paratactic songs in which dead flowers are catalogued into metonymic groupings, the songs finally buried off-stage in what amounts to a theatrical suicide. Still, it is in Ophelia's theatrical suicide, not in Hamlet's productive theatrical work, that the future of the play is mobilized: it is Ophelia's disrupted burial, polluting and unhinged, that propels the play towards its narrative future, not *The Mousetrap* or the soliloquies. Walter Benjamin implies as much when he points out that Hamlet's end is implicated in "vehement externality," because, "as his conversation with Osric indicates, Hamlet wants to imbibe the fate-saturated air, like a poisonous substance, in one deep breath" (137–38). While Benjamin (138) understands this to be death by chance and not death by decision (which, according to Benjamin, is why Hamlet is a mourning play and not a tragedy), it is worth noting that Hamlet's wanting to die by imbibing "a poisonous substance in one deep breath" rehearses, to a fault, the structure of Ophelia's *muddy death*: Hamlet's death seems *overdecided* in Ophelia's off-stage suicide.

Millais therefore does not merely foreground Ophelia's melancholia in his painting, but reveals melancholia itself to be an elaborate structure of foregrounding, where the idea of a functional inside is abandoned. This is why Pre-Raphaelite poetics, with its emphasis on foregrounding, finds its rationale in *Ophelia*, perhaps even a rationalization. It is a rationalization moored in melancholia and in the truth that melancholia commands (evidently, even for Freud). This is also why the Pre-Raphaelites in the late 1840s and the early 1850s, instead of cultivating maudlin historicism – a charge frequently laid at their door – actually derailed the idea of historicism in favor of a historicity where a sense of revolution finds its point of departure. (Which is to say that melancholia in modernity may be revolutionary *before the fact*.) In contrast, historicism seems to be accommodated in the idea of mourning: because mourning is how the past work of the ego is eventually claimed for functional

subjectivation, as an inside and a metaphor (Freud speaks of incorporation and identification, [249]), while the metonymic remains of this work are dismissed, quite literally, as the industrial waste of subjectivation, and consigned to "the external world" (Freud 252).

What receives its true measure of Hamletization through Millais is therefore the chthonic imperative of the Industrial Revolution, in which the underworld (coal, iron, and then oil) metonymized, as the century drew on, into Ruskinian storm-clouds and catastrophic images of expanding pollution and chthonic contamination. What had still been comparatively confined to the entrails of the Earth's crust early in the century (as late as even Charles Lyell's geology in the 1830s) was deconstructed by mid-century into an expansive metonymic apparatus of the industrial world. Mumford captures this industrial Hamletization in an apt metonymy when he observes that the color of iron and coal spread everywhere in the nineteenth century, "from grey to black: the black boots, the black stove-pipe hat, the black coach or carriage, the black iron frame of the hearth, the black cooking pots and pans and stoves," only to ask: "Was it mourning? Was it protective coloration? Was it mere depression of the senses?" (*Technics* 163).

Millais's *Ophelia* appears reducible to this metonymy. Arrested between a *melodious lay* and *muddy death*, Ophelia is shown as she begins to rot in the stream, the process to be advanced, not cancelled or overturned, by her inhaling muddy waters. The melodious lay and the muddy death thus constitute a single metonymy of chthonic expansion, leading to Ophelia's full chthonic transformation. Millais contributes two fitting details to this transformation. First, he adds a string of violets to Ophelia's half-submerged neck. The violets evidently evoke a chthonic future that Laertes attaches to his dead sister at her grave, in Act V ("Lay her i' the earth; –/ And from her fair and unpolluted flesh/ May violets spring," V.i, Shakespeare 121). Yet, Millais claims the chthonic violets for the present tense of his painting – the violets *are* springing from Ophelia's fair but polluting flesh as she begins to rot in the

river. Second, Ophelia's white dress with silver flowers stitched on, which is contiguous with the stream, could be mistaken for a protruding rock formation where metal and fossils are showing: for Millais, there appears to be no functional visual or narrative distinction between Ophelia's metallic attraction in Act III, her muddy suicide in Act IV, and her disrupted burial in Act V.

Fig. 2. John Everett Millais, *Portrait of John Ruskin* (source: Wikipedia)

That these details were important to Millais is backed by his portrait of Ruskin, painted the following year at Glen Finglas, in which a massive whitish horizontal rock formation, suspended in the stream, supports the figure of Ruskin (fig. 2). According to Alastair Grieve, the painting was produced "under Ruskin's strict supervision" and the plan was "to revolutionise British landscape painting and portraiture" (228). While this suggests that Ruskin's portrait was imagined, also, as a detailed geological study, equally striking is the fact that Ruskin's portrait reciprocates the configuration of *Ophelia*, with a matching metonymic placement of the stream, the plants and the massive

whitish rock formation in place of Ophelia's body. Solemnly dressed in Victorian black and grey (of mourning? protective coloration? of depression of the senses?) and vertical to what is horizontal about Ophelia, Ruskin appears to be cast by Millais as a Victorian Hamlet at Ophelia's grave. The two paintings could easily be analyzed as companion pieces.

Ophelia Antigonized

This means that Millais's Ophelia begins for real only when her chthonic condition is foregrounded as she invokes the story of Antigone. Like Antigone, this Ophelia does not merely interrupt the structures of kinship and of politico-sexual reproduction, but inflects them, emphatically, in chthonic terms.[17]

In narrative terms, this modern Antigone is Antigone in reverse, in Millais as in Shakespeare: Ophelia is truly mobilized for the play as she ends, not as she begins, at the critical moment when her suicide rehearses the chthonic conditions of Antigone's suicide. This is to say that the modern Antigone begins in earnest where the Antigone of antiquity ends; this is also to suggest that modernity, insofar as *Hamlet* is its specimen story, begins by rehearsing Antigone's chthonic condition.

Sophocles' *Antigone* anticipates, almost to a fault, the continuity between Ophelia's suicide and burial (between the outside and the inside, between the muddy death and the grave), as well as the narrative transformation thus effected. Nicole Loraux suggests as much when she calls attention

17 According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, all Oedipus-related narratives entail a single binary: overrating kinship (and sexual reproduction) vs. underrating kinship (in favor of the chthonic principle and, by extension, of autochthony). Thus Antigone's suicide coheres around chthonic terms, even if it proceeds from overrating kinship (her grieving the death of Polynices). See Lévi-Strauss (214–15, 230). Equally so Lacan: "[I]t cannot be denied that Antigone is after all concerned with the chthonic laws, the laws of the earth" (*The Seminar* 276–77). Equally so Judith Butler, who remarks in her Antigone book that "Antigone cites the chthonic gods as her authority" (51).

to Antigone's suffocation: decreed by Creon to be "[b]uried alive, the daughter of Oedipus was doomed to die of suffocation, and in making a noose of her virgin's veil she brought on suffocation by other means" (*Tragic* 31).[18] This implies that Antigone does not overturn Creon's ruling, but unsettles and displaces it into a disturbing metonymy: her suffocation by hanging means that she does to herself, by herself, what the earth would do to her by Creon's decree, her body becoming contiguous with the grave, and her suicide with the burial. Her burial of Polynices entails a similar grouping. The body of Polynices is not buried underground; instead, Antigone sprinkles his corpse with a thin layer of dust, which is how the earth, and the chthonic, are mobilized into an expansive metonymy. After Antigone's rites have been undone by Creon's guards, the earth reenacts the metonymy by assuming the shape of a Ruskinian storm-cloud: a guard reports that "suddenly a whirlwind raised a pillar/ Of dust from the ground, a storm of trouble high/ As heaven, it spread across the lowland, it tore/ Away the leaves of the trees and it filled up/ The whole huge sky" (lines 462-6; Sophocles 72). Antigone's suicide by suffocation takes this sustained chthonic metonymy to its logical conclusion, Antigone ultimately becoming a consummate figure of *autochthony.*[19]

This is also the moment when Antigone negotiates her sexual limit, because hanging was a mode of suicide that in Greek tragedy was associated with married women. "By killing herself in the manner of very feminine women," says Loraux, Antigone "found in her death a femininity that in her lifetime she had denied with all her being; she also found something like a marriage" (*Tragic* 32). It is a marriage on chthonic terms, however, in which

18 See also Loraux ("La main" 193).

19 See Jacobs (1996) for the analysis of the dust detail in *Antigone*. See Loraux (1986) for *Antigone* as a tragedy where Sophocles probes the meaning of auto-, especially in *autokheir* (suicide). By focusing on the meaning of *autokheir*, a deed by one's own *hand*, Loraux may be said to contribute to Levi-Strauss's reading of the Oedipus myth because, by killing herself with her own hand, Antigone shifts the meaning of the hand to how the hand is first chthonically imagined in the riddle of the Sphinx – as but another foot that binds man to the ground.

sexual reproduction is cancelled and the narrative order reversed: Loraux calls it a wedding "in reverse" that leads "toward the home of a bridegroom called Hades" (Tragic 37). Loraux also insists that Antigone's suicide is an exception to the rules of Greek tragedy. She calls it an "exceptional death," because "what passes for a rule in the world of tragedy" is that "virgins must die by execution," with a sacrifice being made, "usually with blood shed" (Loraux, Tragic 32). This is why Antigone's suicide by suffocation fails to constitute a proper sacrifice, even though virginal *weddings in reverse* normally do. Instead, her suicide appears to unhinge that which passes for a rule in tragedy, and a certain narrative radicalization, or autochthony, takes place. If Antigone thus anticipates *homo sacer*, now in Greek tragedy (in the very instance where she negotiates her sexual limit, and where narration is radicalized), this is also how she frames the conditions of Ophelia's death.[20] This in turn implies that modernity begins by challenging reproduction, perhaps canceling reproduction altogether (politico-sexual reproduction too) unless the chthonic distribution of the modern world has been taken into account as the modern world's true excess of immanence.

Ophelia rehearses and reverses Antigone in another important aspect: unlike Antigone, who begins for her tragedy with an excessive narrative credit, derived through relationships with her dead father and dead brother, Ophelia begins by being disparaged by her living father and brother, as their witless

20 By lacing Ophelia's neck with a string of violets, Millais all but traces Antigone's noose on Ophelia's throat. This is consistent with the text of *Hamlet*, where violets always come as chthonic marks: first, when Ophelia says that she would give "some violets" to Gertrude, Claudius and Laertes, "but they withered all when my father died" (IV.v), and second, when Laertes invites violets to spring from Ophelia's buried flesh (V.i). Millais binds them into a necklace like the ones commonly made by very young girls, with flowers used as threads for a kind of weaving. This too is consistent with Antigone's noose: Loraux remarks that "women and young girls contrived to substitute for the customary rope those adornments with which they decked themselves and which were also the emblems of their sex, as Antigone strangled herself with her knotted veil. Veils, bands, headbands—all these instruments of seduction were death traps for those who wore them" (*Tragic* 10).

narrative pawn forever in need of instruction. It is only after her suicide that Laertes, at her grave, begins to value her: so that, in another curious reversal, Laertes does for Ophelia, at the end, what Antigone does for Polynices, at the beginning. Equally so with Hamlet and Haemon, the fiancés of the two heroines: unlike Antigone, Ophelia receives full sanction from Hamlet only after her suicide, not before. This explains why Hamlet's death, at the hands of Laertes (and vice versa), does not reciprocate Haemon's suicide, at the end of *Antigone*, but rather rehearses the narrative circumstances of the interlocking murders of Polynices and Eteocles. It is almost as if, thanks to Ophelia, *Hamlet* is how the story of Antigone is turned consistently inside out, into a sustained parataxis.

Ernest Jones intuited this particular Oedipal grouping in *Hamlet*. Even though he sidestepped Antigone in his classic *Hamlet and Oedipus*, Jones nonetheless insists that, "in the original Hamlet legend," Ophelia "was said to be a foster-*sister* of Amleth" and that "in the still earlier Norse source" she "is actually the hero's sister" (140). Jones all but stumbles upon the script of Antigone when he concludes that "[m]ythologicaly we have therefore to equate the Claudius (=Hamlet)–Gertrude relationship with the Laertes (=Hamlet)–Ophelia one" (140). Yet Jones proceeds by analyzing Ophelia as a figure of incest and suspends her chthonic aspect, so that the story of Antigone remains occluded as *the* Oedipal grouping in which *Hamlet* may be inflected. The same may be true of modern reception of Sophocles' *Antigone* broadly speaking, especially perhaps in the nineteenth century, when Antigone's attachment to the dead Polynices was habitually associated with incest. In his book about the literary afterlives of Antigone, George Steiner observes that incest may have been irrelevant to Sophocles' conception of Antigone, but the critical allure associated with incest in the nineteenth century "must be grasped if we are to make sense of the special lustre of *Antigone* in nineteenth-century feeling" (14). Judith Butler, too, notes Antigone's devotion "to an impossible and death-bent incestuous love of her brother" (6).

That *Hamlet*, in turn, provided a template for modern appropriations of *Antigone* is aptly discerned by Bonnie Honig. In Honig's words, "the Hamletization of the avenger that occurs, on Schmitt's account, within the pages of Shakespeare's script has crept up on Sophocles' *Antigone* over time" (147–48), Antigone becoming fused with Hamlet into a distinctly modern order of mourning. However, Honig notes that "[i]n Sophocles's play, the protagonist is, if anything, too decisive, not indecisive" (147) and advises against a hasty identification of Antigone with Hamlet. She thereby emancipates Antigone from Hamlet, but also implies that *Hamlet* may be riddled with an underanalyzed Antigonic residue; what may be at stake is a certain fundamental modern deficiency to acknowledge and understand the Antigonic aspect of *Hamlet*.

That Ophelia may be key to unlocking the Antigonic aspect of *Hamlet* is supported by the fact that Ophelia, like Antigone, is too decisive for the play's order of truth. Her suicide, like Antigone's, exceeds the idea of death, and of revenge, that the play entertains as its rationale; at the same time, this excessive death propels *Hamlet* towards its narrative resolution, almost against the play's will. It is therefore not only that Ophelia's suicide, like Antigone's, is *excessive*: her suicide is also *decisive* to what the play hesitates to mobilize as its future. For this reason, Ophelia's suicide may be too decisive *to begin with*. The same is true of Ophelia's melancholia, from which the suicide proceeds: just before he declares her melancholia to be "[a] document in madness," Laertes finds this madness more mobilizing than reasoned persuasion.[21] Consequently, the very event that propels the play towards resolution is banished to take place off-stage, in what appears to be a futile attempt of the play to immunize itself against (narrative) excess and to bury this excess in a kind of (narrative) tomb or underworld.[22]

---

21 "Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,/ It could not move thus" (IV.v, Shakespeare 104).

22 Liz Appel alludes to a similar condition of Sophocles' play: "[T]he play itself functions

If Ophelia's suicide is therefore a narrative match to what Schmitt describes as the intrusion of history into the play, it also calls attention to the chthonic, Antigonizing aspect of this intrusion at the heart of modernity. Schmitt himself acknowledges the chthonic aspect when he describes intrusive history as "a very hard core of reality" (38) and "the dumb rock against which the play breaks, and the surge of the truly tragic moves forward in a cloud of foam" (39). Also, Schmitt affirms the *narrative* as the instance where the intrusion is negotiated: he invokes the original meaning of *mythos*, in Greek antiquity, in order to explain how *story (mythos)* accommodates the intrusion and ultimately prevails over *genre* in tragedy – this narrative radicalization being that which, according to Schmitt, defines a tragic event. This is how Schmitt in fact claims the narrative over history for the Antigonic state of exception where modernity finds its articulation. Put differently, what happens in tragedy, as Schmitt sees it, is that narrative is forever admitted to it as an intrusion, a decisive excess, introducing into the genre the relations of metonymy and parataxis in the positions where a genre would depend on the logic of metaphor. According to Schmitt, that would be why one can have a play within a play, but not a tragedy within a tragedy, this being what distinguishes tragedy from the mourning play (38). Stretching Schmitt's point, that would be why Ophelia's suicide constitutes a Schmittian tragic event in *Hamlet*, and steers the play towards tragedy, whereas Hamlet's "manic proliferation of theatricality" (Santner 152) steers it towards the mourning play, to which a tragic event is admitted as a narrative *homo sacer*.[23]

---

as an attempt to properly bury its own heroine" and testifies "to the 'maimed rites' (*pace* Ophelia)" (236).

23 See also Jukić (2017) for tragic event and genre in Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*. In Galli's words: "The tragic, for Schmitt, is not then a substantial concept. It is a relational concept – exactly like the political, to which it is indeed, in Schmitt's thought, structurally similar" (73). See Simons (781) for Schmitt's mobilization of narrative in critical terms; Pan identifies "the importance of myth for political representation" as "a pivotal question that underlies all of Schmitt's political theory" (732). That Schmitt saw historical intrusion as *chthonic* (and himself as Hamlet?) can be evinced from an entry in his diary, in the

Critics have associated Schmitt's "hard core of reality" and "dumb rock" with Lacan's concept of the real.[24] In turn, Lacan acknowledges Ophelia's chthonic aspect and attaches to Ophelia a number of chthonic groupings. For instance, he calls attention to the fact that the murder of Polonius, Ophelia's father, involves "the ridiculous dragging around of his body by the feet" ("Desire" 39), all but invoking the chthonic feet of Oedipus, with Ophelia as an appropriate modern Antigone. Ophelia cuts a chthonic figure for Hamlet as well, Lacan describing her as "the bait in the trap that Hamlet doesn't fall into" ("Desire" 11–12). Yet Ophelia, killing herself, eventually lures Hamlet into her tomb as the very chthonic trap that he does fall into. Indeed, Lacan also calls attention to "the furious battle at the bottom of the tomb" where "Hamlet is finally presented with the possibility of winding things up," this being the chthonic scene of Ophelia's (re)integration: it is here, says Lacan, that "we see something like a reintegration of the object a, won back … at the price of mourning and death" ("Desire" 23–24). Finally, in his discussion of *Antigone*, Lacan quotes from Sophocles, about Antigone being "destined to give help, ωφελεν, to the dead," only to add – "we spoke about the same word in connection with Ophelia" (*The Seminar* 270). Antigone and Ophelia are thereby bound into a chthonic bait that threatens to trap Lacan's own psychoanalytic reading of *Hamlet*, Lacan assuming the position of Hamlet. If this means that Lacan's psychoanalysis, like Hamlet, finds its rationale in mourning (not in melancholia), it also means that it compares to Schmitt's understanding of the play (*Spiel*), in contradistinction to Schmitt's take on tragedy.

To be sure, Lacan ("Desire" 39) describes *Hamlet* as "a tragedy of the

---

1930s. On the day he joined the NSDAP Schmitt reports being "distressed by the 'insolence and arrogance' of an SA student speaker: 'often afraid of his chthonic brutality and force'" (Bendersky 133, emphasis added).

24 See Strathausen 19–20, Leonard 203.

underworld," but associates the underworld with the "inexpiable" influence of the father's ghost on the play, to which Ophelia and Polonius are offered "in expiation," as a kind of flawed sacrifice (as sacrificial junk?). Yet Ophelia, thus flawed, persists for Lacan as that instance where the narrative overrides the play and decides its course: "it is the hour of Ophelia, the hour of her suicide, when the tragedy will run its course" ("Desire" 18). Also, it is through Ophelia that Lacan ultimately Hamletizes his Antigone, when he describes Antigone as a function of ωφελεν: Ophelia naming the metonymic traffic between Antigone and the underworld. Ophelia, it follows, presses for a reversal in Lacan's reading of *Hamlet*, a reversal that corresponds in many ways to the narrative reversal of the Antigone script in *Hamlet*. Ophelia confronts the classic Lacanian reading of *Hamlet* with a demand to shift emphasis from the beginning of the play (the inexpiable paternal injunction) onto the play's resolution, which is decided on the outside of that which Hamlet imagines as the play, and in the position that the play assigns to chthonic junk. It is a shift from the play's *injunctions* to narrative *autochthony*. Again, this may be how Ophelia adumbrates the rise of the novel, which is based in narrative autochthony, against that aspect of *Hamlet* which remains imbued with a pre-modern understanding of politics *and* literature (most conspicuously perhaps in the paternal injunction with which the play opens).[25]

Ruskin anticipates this constellation in *Modern Painters*, in a brief discussion of sorrow in Shakespeare. Sorrow, according to Ruskin (*Modern* 233), takes "a form of blindness" in Shakespeare's tragedy, as it does in Greek tragedy. In Shakespeare, however, this "issues in little more than haste and indiscretion" (*Modern* 233), because Shakespeare's sorrow fails to relate to criminality, even though it may be fatal. For Ruskin, that is, crime does not

25 See Schmitt (51–53) for a medieval residue in Hamlet and especially in Benjamin's grasp of *Hamlet*, which Schmitt identifies as pre-political. I take injunction here as a speech-act that best describes the language of the father's ghost in *Hamlet*; see Derrida (7, 34, 50, 116).

seem to be tragic unless it finds a full intellectual destination in sorrow; this is why sorrow and crime, disjointed, result in nothing but "dead march and clothes of burial" at "the close of a Shakspere tragedy [sic!]" (*Modern* 234). Ruskin could be drawing on Schmitt here: once crime is disjointed from sorrow, its destination is not tragedy but the play, *Spiel*, with its theatrical show of dead marches and clothes of burial. Tellingly, Ruskin cites Ophelia, not *Hamlet*, as an example of this sorrow, as if to suggest that Hamlet's mourning does not qualify as sorrow in a tragic sense, whereas Ophelia's melancholia does. Without Ophelia, Ruskin seems to be saying, Hamlet would lose its tragic bearings altogether, as well as the scar of its disconnection from Greek tragedy. Like Schmitt, Ruskin implies that modern crime is fated to remain thus scarred, this being its modern condition – this also being why modernity may be profoundly tragic to begin with.

Ruskin names Antigone as Ophelia's counterpart, in that same passage of *Modern Painters*. For Ruskin, Antigone exemplifies Greek tragedy, because the victim in a Greek tragedy "may indeed be innocent, as Antigone, but is in some way resolutely entangled with crime, and destroyed by it, as if struck by pollution, no less than participation" (*Modern* 233).[26] This means that Antigone forges a metonymic link between crime and the world, through pollution no less than by participation, into a sorrow which is not fully contained within subjectivity. Ruskin may be claiming a Freudian sense of melancholia for Antigone here: he all but identifies melancholia as *metonymic sorrow* or *syntactic sorrow*, in contradistinction to mourning. It should be noted that Ruskin's Victorian Ophelia and Antigone are philological as much as they are psychopolitical: to Ruskin, their metonymic sorrow is significant insofar as it binds tragedy, crime, and the world into an operative assemblage. It follows that psychoanalysis heals, into a method and a grammar, that which is syntac-

26 Sophocles associates Antigone with pollution more than once, just as pollution is associated with the chthonic, in line 838 for instance, where Hades is identified as "[t]he only god whom she reveres" (lines 838–9), 88.

tic about a coming together of politics and philology in the nineteenth century; it is in this sense that Freud's psychoanalytic reading of Oedipus may have translated, into a grammar, the Antigonic syntax that was decisive both to the nineteenth-century novel and to the century's psychopolitics. Indeed, as Freud distinguishes between mourning and melancholia, Ruskin distinguishes between participation and pollution; mourning would be a psychoanalytic fit for Ruskin's participation, as melancholia would be a fit for pollution. By claiming pollution for Antigone in *Modern Painters* and then for the nineteenth century in the storm-cloud lectures, Ruskin suggests that participation should be revisited as a cornerstone of modernity and inflected in pollution (just as the first-person narrator of a Victorian *Bildungsroman* is inflected in the conditions of the focalizing consciousness). This is how the world of the Industrial Revolution, which is polluted *to begin with*, is admitted by Ruskin to political modernity, now as its inalienable metonymic inflection: the Industrial Revolution doing to the idea of modernity what Sophocles' Antigone does to the idea of democracy in fifth-century Athens.

Millais's *Ophelia* prefigures Ruskin's Antigone with a tacit demand that narrative autochthony associated with Ophelia be admitted to the Victorian ideation of industrial modernity. Millais seems to intuit that narrative autochthony, exemplified in the nineteenth century by the novel, is grasped as junk by the century's criticism and philosophy, so that the novel is to them what Ophelia is to Hamlet. The invention of the focalizing consciousness in the nineteenth century may have been how the novel itself addressed this problem, perhaps with Antigone as its template. After all, the language allocated to the focalizing consciousness in the novel, which refuses to heal into a method and a grammar, may be a match to Antigone's language, which is readily identified as flawed and faulty by critical theory.[27] Like Antigone, the focalizing

27 Antigone's language has been variously described in terms of stammering, repetition, tautology, and negations (which "riddle her speech"); see Butler 68, Honig 97. The same may be true of Millais himself, who was "singularly lacking in the classical basis to his education which was still standard for other nineteenth-century middle-class boys" (Sanders

consciousness in the nineteenth-century novel does not get to write a *Bildungsroman* and become a David Copperfield.

Works Cited

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford UP, 1998.

Appel, Liz. "*Autochthonous Antigone*: Breaking Ground." *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism*, edited by S. E. Wilmer and Audronė Žuskaukaitė, Oxford UP, 2010, pp. 229–39.

Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Glassworlds. Glass Culture and the Imagination* 1830–1880. Oxford UP, 2008.

---. "The Pre-Raphaelites and literature." *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, edited by Elizabeth Prettejohn, Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 15–31.

Armstrong, Nancy. *Fiction in the Age of Photography. The Legacy of British Realism.* Harvard UP, 1999.

Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.* Princeton UP, 2003.

Bal, Mieke. "*Myth à la lettre*: Freud, Mann, Genesis and Rembrandt, and the story of the son." *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature*, edited by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Methuen, 1987, pp. 57–89.

---. "Narration and Focalization." *Narrative Theory. Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies. Volume 1. Major Issues in Narrative Theory*, edited by Bal, Routledge, 2007, pp. 263–96.

Barlow, Paul. "John Everett Millais (1829–1896)." *The Cambridge Companion to the Pre-Raphaelites*, edited by Elizabeth Prettejohn, Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 133–47.

Barringer, Tim. *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites.* Yale UP, 1998.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Blackwell, 1992.

Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plots. Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge UP, 2009.

---

71).

Bendersky, Joseph W. "Schmitt's Diaries." *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, edited by Jens Meierhenrich and Oliver Simons, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 117–46.

Benjamin, Walter. *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*. Harvard UP, 2019.

Bronfen, Elisabeth. *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester UP, 1996.

Brooks, Peter. *Realist Vision.* Yale UP, 2005.

Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim. Kinship Between Life and Death.* Columbia UP, 2000.

Caruth, Cathy. *Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions. Locke, Wordsworth, Kant, Freud.* The Johns Hopkins UP, 2009.

Codell, Julie F. "Painting Keats: Pre-Raphaelite Artists Between Social Transgressions and Painterly Conventions." *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 33, nos. 3–4, 1995, pp. 341–70.

---. "Empiricism, Naturalism and Science in Millais's Paintings." *John Everett Millais Beyond the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, edited by Debra N. Mancoff, Yale UP, 2001, pp. 119–47.

Comay, Rebecca. "Paradoxes of Lament: Benjamin and Hamlet". *Lament in Jewish Thought*, edited by Ilit Ferber and Paula Schwebel, De Gruyter, 2014, pp. 257–75.

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues.* Columbia UP, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Routledge, 2006.

Dickens, Charles. "Old Lamps for New Ones." *Household Words*, vol. I, no. 12, 15 June 1850, pp. 265–67.

Eşanu, Octavian, editor. "Realism Today?" *ARTMargins*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2018, pp. 58–82.

Felman, Shoshana. "Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 98, no. 5, 1983, pp. 1021–53.

Fludernik, Monika. "Mediacy, Mediation, and Focalization: The Squaring of Terminological Circles." *Postclassical Narratology. Approaches and Analyses*, edited by Jan Alber and Fludernik, The Ohio State UP, 2010, pp. 105–33.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. XIV, edited by James Strachey, The Hogarth P, 1957.

Gagnier, Regenia. *Subjectivities. A History of Self-Representation in Britain*, 1832–1920. Oxford UP, 1991.

Gallagher, Catherine. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction. Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832–1867*. The U of Chicago P, 1985.

Galli, Carlo. "*Hamlet*: Representation and the Concrete." *Political Theology and Early Modernity*, edited by Graham Hammill and Julia Reinhard Lupton. The U of Chicago P, 2012, pp. 60–83.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *North and South*. Oxford UP, 1982.

Gates, Barbara. *Victorian Suicide. Mad Crimes and Sad Histories.* Princeton UP, 1988.

Grieve, Alastair. "Ruskin and Millais at Glenfinlas." *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 138, no. 1117, 1996, pp. 228–34.

Hares-Stryker, Carolyn, editor. *An Anthology of Pre-Raphaelite Writings*. Sheffield Academic P, 1997.

Heidegger, Martin. *What is Called Thinking?* Harper & Row, 1968.

Honig, Bonnie. *Antigone, Interrupted.* Cambridge UP, 2013.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848*. Vintage, 1996.

Jacobs, Carol. "Dusting Antigone." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 111, no. 5, 1996, pp. 889–917.

Jones, Ernest. *Hamlet and Oedipus.* Norton, 1976.

Jukić, Tatjana. *Zazor, nadzor, sviđanje. Dodiri književnog i vizualnog u britanskom 19. stoljeću.* Zavod za znanost o književnosti Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2002.

---. 2017. "Cavell's Shakespeare, or the Insufficiency of Tragedy for Modernity." *Bollettino Filosofico*, vol. 32, pp. 67–87.

Lacan, Jacques. "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet." *Yale French Studies*, vols. 55/56, 1977, pp. 11–52.

---. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Norton, 1997.

Leonard, Miriam. "Carl Schmitt: Tragedy and the Intrusion of History." *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity*, edited by Joshua Billings and Leonard, Oxford UP, 2015, pp. 194–211.

Lévi-Strauss, *Claude. Structural Anthropology.* Basic Books, 1963.

Levine, George. Realism, Ethics and Secularism: Essays on Victorian Literature and Science. Cambridge UP, 2008.

Loraux, Nicole. "La main d'Antigone." *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens,* vols. 1/2, 1986, pp. 165–96.

---. *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*. Harvard UP, 1987.

Meierhenrich, Jens, and Oliver Simons. "'A Fanatic of Order in an Epoch of Confusing Turmoil': The Political, Legal, and Cultural Thought of Carl Schmitt." *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, edited by Meierhenrich and Simons, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 3–70.

Menke, Christoph. "The Possibility of Revolution." *Crisis & Critique*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2017, pp. 314–24.

Millais, J.G. *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais*. Methuen, 1899.

Miller, J. Hillis. "Henry James and 'Focalization,' or Why James Loves Gyp." *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, edited by James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, Blackwell, 2005, pp. 124–35.

Mumford, Lewis. *Technics and Civilization*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1934.

---. *The Culture of Cities*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970.

Oak Taylor, Jesse. "Storm-Clouds on the Horizon: John Ruskin and the Emergence of the Anthropogenic Climate Change." *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, vol. 26, 2018, pp. 1–19, doi.org/10.16995/ntn.802. Accessed 15 Apr. 2020.

Pan, David. "Tragedy as Exception in Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba." The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, edited by Jens Meierhenrich and Oliver Simons, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 731–50.

Peterson, Kaara L., and Deanne Williams. "Introduction: The Afterlives of Ophelia." *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, edited by Peterson and Williams, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 1–9

Rhodes, Kimberly. "Degenerate Detail: John Everett Millais and Ophelia's 'Muddy Death.'" *John Everett Millais Beyond the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, edited by Debra N. Mancoff, Yale UP, 2001, pp. 43–68.

Rose, Andrea. *The Pre-Raphaelites.* Phaidon P, 1992.

Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters*, vol. 5, George Allen, 1897.

---. "The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century." *The Complete Works*, vol. XXIV, The Kelmscott Society, 1900, pp. iii–68.

---. *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, Routledge, 1907.

Said, Edward. "Introduction." *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* by Erich Auerbach, Princeton UP, 2003, pp. i–xxiv.

Sanders, Andrew. "Millais and Literature." J*ohn Everett Millais Beyond the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, edited by Debra N. Mancoff, Yale UP, 2001, pp. 69–93.

Santner, Eric L. *The Royal Remains. The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty.* The U of Chicago P, 2011.

Schmitt, Carl. *Hamlet or Hecuba.* Plutarch P, 2006.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet. The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare,* vol. 7, Cambridge UP, 2009.

Showalter, Elaine. "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism." *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, edited by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, Methuen, 1985, pp. 77–94.

Simons, Oliver. "Carl Schmitt's Spatial Rhetoric." *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, edited by Jens Meierhenrich and Oliver Simons, Oxford UP, 2016, pp. 776– 802.

Sloterdijk, Peter. *Rage and Time. A Psychopolitical Investigation.* Columbia UP, 2010.

Smith, Lindsay. *Victorian Photography, Painting and Poetry. The Enigma of Visibility in Ruskin, Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites.* Cambridge UP, 1995.

Sophocles. *Antigone.* Oxford UP, 2003.

Steiner, George. *Antigones. How the Antigone Legend Has Endured in Western Literature, Art, and Thought.* Yale UP, 1996.

Strathausen, Carsten. "Myth or Knowledge: On Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba.*" *Telos*, vol. 153, Winter 2010, pp. 1–23.

Teschke, Benno. "Carl Schmitt's Concepts of War: A Categorical Failure." *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, edited by Jens Meierhenrich and Oliver Simons, Oxord UP, 2016, pp. 367–400.

Tatjana Bijelić
University of Banja Luka

Exophonic Ecopoetics as a Transformative Force: Concepts and Illustrations

In the world of transnational literature that increasingly accommodates contemporary East European poetry of displacement, composing literary texts in English as a second, foreign, or an additional language has become a multifaceted strategy of personal survival, economic prosperity, cultural and academic exchange, political witnessing, and social critique. Writing beyond their mother tongues, voicing themselves from the outside, from a distance, or serving as foreign insiders and domestic outsiders, exophonic or non-native writers of literature in English seem to be extending the global poetic field in ways that involve various social and environmental concerns. Illustrating my claims with some of the ecologically-aware poems or lines authored by Bulgarian-born Kapka Kassabova and Yugoslav-born Charles Simic, I attempt to demonstrate how contemporary poetry of displacement, due to its attention to place and global mobility, emerges as equally preoccupied with environmental and social transformations on local and global levels. I also explore the potential of such poetry to create a dynamic platform at which ecopoetics and exophonic writing converge in producing poetry that simultaneously contains traditional elements of nature poetry, acknowledges contemporary concepts of natureculture and unnatural ecopoetics, and estranges itself through claiming familiarity with another language. Drawing upon Sarah Nolan's definition of "unnatural ecopoetics" and its experimental potential, I propose considering the concept of "exophonic ecopoetics" when referring to contemporary poetry of displacement, its translingual features, and ecological concerns.

Key words: exophonic ecopoetics, poetry of displacement, East European poetry in English, Kapka Kassabova, Charles Simic

In most of her early poems from the collections *All Roads Lead to the Sea* (1997) and *Dismemberment* (1998), published in New Zealand and republished in the UK, along with her most recent work, Bulgarian-born Kapka Kassabova in *Someone else's life* (2003) tackles variously intertwined contemporary issues of identity, place, displacement, and environmental estrangement. A polyglot writer who emigrated from Bulgaria at the age of 17, only to find her temporary or more permanent homes in New Zealand, France, Germany, Argentina, India, and the UK, she speaks Bulgarian, Russian, French, and English. As a poet, she claims that reading and composing poems is the easiest way into a new language because it is in poetry that she finds her voice ("Kapka", 01:28-01:30). Referring to her displaced family as "economic migrants" and "accept[ing] the label of migrant for herself," Kassabova claims that being displaced serves as a "motivating factor in her creativity" ("Interview" 135).

Unlike political migrants, exiles and refugees, who have often preferred to articulate displacement in their mother tongues since "the very attempt at verbalizing [their] memory in a foreign language not only extends [their] melancholy phase but defers a resolution" (Aleksić 171), English-writing Kassabova can be partly observed through the lens of Julia Kristeva's "happy foreigner" (3–4) who, like a Braidottian nomadic globetrotter, appears to be rootless and self-sufficient. However, while Kassabova's displacement is voluntary and economically based, it can be argued that her early poems reflect the speaker's intention to self-translate the "immigrant pain" (Hron 39–40) attached to most newcomers' perceptions of social and environmental changes. While Kristeva vividly depicts one's mother tongue as "the language of the past that withers without ever leaving you" (15), which obviously complicates and challenges the position of non-native-speaker writers in relation to the mental blueprints of their mother tongues, she also defines the new, additional language as just another instrument or a device providing polyglots with a new body, however artificial and sublimated it may be. Kristeva calls the new language "a resurrection" during which one gets a "new skin," "new

sex," and a realm of (productive) silence that bridges the two languages (15–16). While the new-skin identity achieved through displacement and writing in a foreign language often signifies entrance into a realm of possibilities that promises reinvention and empowerment, it also enables the verbalization of cultural differences and social actualities within broader civilizational contexts. Thus the enthusiastic thinking foreigner, striving for more authenticity, usually merges their personal (un)happiness with collective positions of mostly underprivileged individuals, voicing an array of global concerns in a new language acquired through geographical displacement.

The new language as a reluctantly discussed creative writing tool has undergone many namings, passing through diverse phases of otherness, anotherness, secondness, foreignness, non-nativeness, and externality. Inspired by the Japanese-German writer Yoko Tawada while addressing the importance of naming the new language in a more inclusive and general way, Chantal Wright (38) observes that creative experiments with additional languages have not been adequately defined. Acknowledging that authors who write beyond their mother tongues need a comprehensive term of their own due to the generally innovative stylistic features of their work or unique experiences of other languages and cultures, she finds the term *exophonic writers* and *exophony* as more appropriate than *non-native-speaker writers* and *hyphenated writers*. According to Wright, exophonic authors' "childhoods were spent in other languages, [which] makes itself felt in their [target language] writing" (38). Although the writers' exophony may not imply anything about their background, exophonic writing, according to Stephen Slemon, "allows for comparative study of the phenomenon of exophony across linguistic boundaries, while always bearing in mind 'the local'" (qtd. in Wright 40).

Reading Kassabova's poems of immigration at the intersections between environmentally and textually defined concepts of place and space, land and memory, experience and language, emplacement and displacement, and illustrating my discussion with references to other poets who originate

from Eastern Europe, I will argue that contemporary poetry of displacement has its roots and prospects in simultaneous focusing on nature and social transformations, which suggests its possible contextualization within the fields of ecopoetics and exophonic writing. I will also explore the potential of transnational poetry of displacement to create a dynamic platform at which ecopoetics and exophonics converge in producing poetry that at the same time contains traditional elements of nature poetry, acknowledges concepts of natureculture and unnatural ecopoetics, and estranges itself through claiming familiarity with another language.

According to Lynn Keller, traditional nature writing tended to "position nature as something apart from the human," which was usually achieved by insisting on "elegiac or nostalgic" poetic texts that were not fully aware of the importance of "renovat[ing] language to foster more sustainable relations to the planet and its inhabitants" (581). The need to "renovate" language was also felt almost a decade earlier, with Lawrence Buell noticing that "environmental criticism's working conception of 'environment' has broadened in recent years from 'natural' to include also the urban, the interweave of 'built' and 'natural' dimensions in every locale, and the interpenetration of the local and global" (12). Paying particular attention to whether "local toponymy, vernacularization, and indigenous names for uniquely native species" are foregrounded in nature writing, Buell also reveals that "language never replicates extratextual landscapes, but it can be bent toward or away from them" (33). Based on this, along with Sarah Nolan's more recent ideas of "unnatural ecopoetics" that incorporate a necessity for language experimentation because "contemporary poets do not live in a world where nature is distinguishable from culture" (28), it may be timely to speak about exophonic ecopoetics as something that increasingly resonates with worldwide migrations in a transnational world, where poets seem to globalize or glocalize themselves by being displaced, newly local and renovating English as a global language.

As part of her poetry cycle "Place," Kapka Kassabova's two-stanza poem "My life in two parts" is clearly illustrative of the potential of displacement texts to incorporate voicing from outside with environmental observations and concerns. The poet juxtaposes two lands and cultures, identifying the Balkans as her place of origin while the other geographical destination remains unnamed:

1
Outside my window is a row of poplars
growing from the turf of childhood.
Poplars grow in rows, never on their own.
It is Christmas. The sky is full of stars,
the branches are bare,
the wolves distant and menacing.
Now is the only time for oranges.
Their brisk fragrance fills the nails
as we lie in cold rooms high in the Balkans
dreaming of palm trees and the world.

2
Outside my window is a palm tree.
It is winter. The sky is enormous
and the ocean follows the moon.
Oranges are on the window-sill with other
tropical fruit no longer of interest.
Bright-plumed parakeets sway in the palm tree
and that's the only time I look up.
I lie in the low, stuffy rooms of adulthood
dreaming of poplars and the world.
Always, they come in rows.

(*Someone else's life* 12)

To make sense of relocation desire expressed through yearning for differently unattainable landscapes, the poem relies on a dual nature of

things, but its two mirroring parts, strictly divided by being numbered, seem to project uneven reflections and non-binary specificities of place. The neatly separated windows, however distant, conjoin to accommodate a single poetic voice that feeds on the tropes of memory and outsideness. Oranges are both a festive luxury and a daily treat. Poplars are at the same time tangible and out of reach. Continents apart, similarly connoted feelings of highness and lowness are simultaneously inside and outside, and the speaker capitalizes on the cultural duplicities of home and abroad that are, according to the poet herself, best expressed in a language not one's own. While perceptions of nature and environment evidently depend on geopolitical differences between the two places, the "cold" Balkans and an "enormous" sky / ocean, the former named and the latter nameless but marked as "tropical" and therefore both foreign and familiar, Kassabova does not get a clearer vision of her native poplars only because she reimagines them from spatial, temporal, and situational distances, or because she simply juxtaposes them with palm trees. She is primarily creating a new literary value by choosing to self-translate her former surroundings within expanding spaces of another language, which resonates with Buell's claim that language cannot replicate extratextual landscapes (33), but that it can possibly modify and recreate our perceptions of them, particularly through exophonic expression.

Anglo-American ecocritical interventions in the concepts of place and space as both poetic and physical texts have become more prominent in the last two or three decades. In her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between language and the physical environment" that "takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xviii), with "one foot in literature and the other on land" (xix). In a similar vein, W. H. New observes land as a conglomeration of place and text in which "people read place in words" or "as words," while words themselves can be read "as place" because of their physical dimensions and an ability to occupy space and transform through relocation (165). Acknowledging the significance of "the place-space framework in interacting

with ecological texts" in general, and ecopoetry in particular, Scott J. Bryson suggests that ecopoetic texts challenge prevalent humanocentric attitudes towards the rest of nature by *creat[ing] place* and *valu[ing] space* in recognition of environmental vastness and diversity (5, 8). Claiming that ecopoems represent "a new movement in poetry" (3) that simultaneously converses with traditional nature poetry and goes beyond it by problematizing contemporary world issues, Bryson emphasizes the relevance of "place-making" and "space-consciousness" for creating a balanced and harmonized ecotext (18). While ecopoetics can thus stretch from "topophiliac devotion to the places we inhabit" (12) to a sense of placelessness that favors space over place (21), it can also be approached from additional perspectives, two of them being "topological" and "ethnological" (Skinner 128, 129). According to Skinner, ethnological ecopoetics transcends boundaries by looking beyond Western languages and cultures in order to bring fresh insights and attitudes through "an act of translation" (129). The ethnological approach combined with Gillen Wood's remark that literary texts in their complexity are comparable to the biosciences by being "multiscalar" in their treatment of variously connoted objects, while "draw[ing] their character from the expressive diversity of language" and its "allusive webs" to create "a powerful estranging effect" (10), can as well contribute to a better understanding of exophonic ecopoetics. Wood's statement that "social history . . . is ecological in character rather than simply dramatic or ideological" considers equalities of social and natural factors in shaping a large yet underestimated "socio-environmental nexus" (6) that embraces human and nonhuman communities, globality and alterity.

In her article on the international turn in ecocriticism that greatly expanded the scope of environmental literary criticism after 2000 by focusing on world literature along with traditionally more explored British and American literary works, Ursula K. Heise stresses the importance of "the interface of human and nonhuman systems," stating that cultural communities, social practices, and ecological conditions shape one another to an almost equal measure (8). Heise's perception of the global dynamics of cultural and en-

vironmental resources builds upon what Adamson and Slovic term as a new third wave of ecocriticism, "which recognizes ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries" (6). Observing that "multi-ethnic groups from around the world are increasingly entering the conversation about ecocriticism on their own terms by producing artistic expressions of their responses to the natural world" (10), Adamson and Slovic also draw attention to "American ethnic writers, who are often voluntarily or involuntarily placed and displaced" (11). They also highlight Lawrence Buell's call on ecocritics to embark on explaining "the ways in which migration and diaspora complicate traditional understandings of the sense of place" (16). From this perspective, the inclusion of emigrant writing in ecocritical preoccupations can help extend the notion of traditional place-centeredness to encompass global migrations and mobility within transnational frameworks.

Exophonic and ecologically aware, the poetic subject throughout Kassabova's *Someone else's life* is visibly decentered due to her diverse experiences of movement and displacement. As a "citizen of the unknown," she is a stranger who, while seeking protection from natural forces, both "lament[s]" the impossibility of creating a home place and "leave[s] footprints in the air" (14) in recognition of the globality of space. Depicting a day in New Zealand's transnational community, in which "nothing is ever the same" (19), she senses personal and collective estrangement from the land where belonging is out of question and changes are situational and constant. Her memories of a "childhood in an East European city / of shadows and fogs" (47), both oppressive and dear, seem to be washed away by "frivolous tide[s]" (67) of the hostland's "metallic and cruel" ocean that makes her "sick" and inadequate (85). While she remembers the exhilaration of coming to the promised sunlit paradise with exotic parakeets, her reminiscences of both places are evasive and partly preserved not only in her head depicted as a "cracked cup of memory" (15), but also in some unevenly distributed "clusters of moments touching each other / with phantom limbs" (73). The unreliability of

memory that is protracted by fragmented images of extratextual landscapes is further explored within a spatial consciousness of a newly acquired language. Reminiscing on the foreignness and incompleteness of her initial experiences of life in displacement, the speaker resorts to a collective we in an attempt to voice her close migrant community, their hopes and expectations, adding that "[i]t's a sign of fluency to dream in a language / but we dream wide-awake" (78) "in yet another / native tongue" (72). While alluding to a possibility of estrangement from the mother tongue and culture or origin, the alertness with which the speaker's we reacts to new landscapes and sounds signals an exophonic's need to fit into a novel environment by responding to its nature and social realities with a sense of expressive responsibility characteristic of socially-conscious and ecologically-aware individuals. As a result of merging new landscapes and languages, "dreaming wide-awake" often becomes engaged with wider world problems of human and nonhuman exploitation based on identity differences and (post)colonial heritage. Kassabova's poem "Balinese," situated at "the Indian ocean" and divided into two parts, 'Taking a photograph' and 'Made,' exposes many faces of exploitation that overlap with land pollution and deterioration of tourist-defined exoticism:

(. . .)
Out in the empty field
behind luxury hotels
garbage flutters,
white blossoms fall from trees
with nobody to stand beneath,
smiling photogenically
so the filth, the heat
and the absence of hope
become exotic backdrop.
Tonight, I am the backdrop.
I am the blurry stranger in the photograph,
with her mouth open almost in laughter,
saying: This is not my ocean.
This is not my pain. (*Someone else's life* 24)

Forming her own picture of exoticism seen through the eyes of a sensible tourist who perceives the environment before she steps in to make a change, the speaker stresses the contrast between luxuriously constructed hotels and man-made garbage that devastates nature and conquers the surroundings. Whilst noticing basic society-nature disconnections caused by human negligence and capitalistic tendencies that obstruct spontaneous human interactions within nature, the concerned tourist continues playing her traditionally designated role as a happy foreigner, yet she resolutely detaches from the place, sensing its bleakness and desolation but refusing to be overwhelmed by it.

The second part of the "Balinese" double-poem, which is addressed to Made, an underprivileged young woman who works at "the café of Bali Sun," juxtaposes preconceived identities of locals and foreigners. Aware of Made's unenviable life full of hardships, in which the woman is denied education but expected to provide for her family, the speaker who stays at her "false" luxury hotel reveals what is really authentic beyond the local woman's friendly and seemingly carefree disposition:

(. . .)
For us you smiled and spoke
your self-taught English.
For us you were the friendly local.

You have taken off your apron,
wiped off your smile
and walked to your room.
You have washed your clothes
ready for tomorrow,
lit a cigarette and lain
in the humid night.
You listen to the ocean

break over the reef.
You think of me and my white tribes,
how your life is our holiday.
We're out of here tomorrow but you,
you're only twenty four
and you don't dare dream
before you go to sleep. (*Someone else's life* 25)

The speaker's empathy for the Balinese woman, who is taken for granted by most tourists and perceived merely as a functional part of the exotic setting, enables valuable insights into a "self-taught" exophony that sustains local life. Spoken by Made, English as a foreign language is both a burden and a strategy of survival. It disguises the local into a presentable mediator who facilitates basic understanding between cultures in a globalizing world that, paradoxically, encourages traditional views of exoticism and thus perpetuates class differences and racial inequality. Evidently exploited and unable to visualize a more fulfilling future, Made is nevertheless aware of the power dynamics operating in her surroundings and discriminating people based on their land of origin, financial standing, and skin color. Empathizing with the socially underprivileged woman on the margins, the speaker discloses the inverted exoticism of her "white tribes," whose otherness, however, remains more privileged because they can afford entertaining themselves as tourists by tailoring the image of the local woman to fit their temporary needs.

Whether the poet foregrounds migrant, tourist, or local issues, the background usually contains sights of nature in all its variety, from the indifferent or soothing lushness of palm trees to polluted cities and disastrous storms. While the vastness of ocean-space tends to evoke homesickness and hopelessness in immigrants, it often arouses tourists' admiration. But, for locals like Made, it is mostly present in the form of a constant background sound. Poeticizing nature along with displaced human lives, experiences of travel, local transformations and global preoccupations, Kassabova seems to

create a flexible cosmopolitan poetic subject, whose worldliness is also pronounced in her prose works.

In her article on *Street Without a Name*, Kassabova's 2008 memoir and travelogue depicting life under communism in the late 1970s and 1980s, Ludmilla Kostova problematizes the author's cosmopolitanism, arguing that the displacement of Bulgarian and other former Eastern Bloc professionals who fled politically repressive one-party systems "has led to the emergence of a distinctive *postnational* migrant middle-class identity" (166) which is, unlike transnational identities, closely linked to the migrants' cultures of birth. While Kostova accuses Kassabova of "rejecting cultural rootedness" (173) and flirting with elitist transnationalism, another scholar, Ioana Luca, acknowledges the complexity of the writer's subject positions. According to Luca, Kassabova is not simply national or foreign, but she evidently "takes turns in being a native, a tourist, a foreigner, a foreign journalist, the returned exile, just to discover the pitfalls and impossibility of any such identity" (74). Addressing Kassabova's poetry collection *Geography for the Lost* (2007), Kostova detects "the absence of an identifiable home," blaming it on the poet's resistance to being pigeonholed and thus re-installed within the boundaries of her native culture (173). That a single identification is certainly reductive, if not implausible, has already been discerned in *Someone else's life*, which is, according to Mark Strand, "the book of perpetual exile, of endless comings and goings, in a world that offers neither stability, nor salvation" (qtd. in Kassabova, *Someone* 90). Poems such as "My life in two parts," "Balinese," and "Berlin-Mitte" portray precarious positions of natives, migrants, tourists, foreigners, and ghosts of the past, signaling that there is no reconciliation, "but a continuous exploration of belonging" (Luca 74). Impersonating all available identities through her "willed uprootedness" and "unwilling defamiliarization," Kassabova creates, as Luca rightly observes, "a language of communist and post-communist alienation, geographical and ontological displacement" that is "emblematic for the new global, transnational Eastern European generations" (75–76) whose crossing multiple borders modifies their identities,

creative expressions, and perceptions of place.

Addressing divergent aspects of border culture that include not only the Iron Curtain as both "an actual place" and "a metaphor," but also the borders that stop "[t]he Middle Eastern refugees of today," Kassabova states that "[b]order zones are extreme peripheries, [or] margins where the fabric is thin," which enables archetypal presences of border defenders, trespassers, natives, smugglers, and all others who either cross the border illegally or are in some ways affected by the border culture (*There*). Judging from the poems entitled "In Transit" (*Someone* 33) and "Refugees" (34), the poet serves as an empathetic outsider who witnesses and conveys the pain of those stuck around the border, which instead of being a safe place "creates a culture of paranoia and insecurity" (ibid.). The multiple representations of human migrations on global and local levels are also tightly connected to ecological awareness and environmental issues. In just a few clear-cut lines, Kassabova offers brief snapshots of a barren field, a dispossessed and powerless human, and a divided and polluted landscape wrapped in a debilitating atmosphere of social animosities, which altogether points to a civilizational failure to provide safe and sustainable environment for human and nonhuman species:

There is a field of frozen mud
and in the middle – a border.
On this side of the border
a pear tree that doesn't bear fruit.
Under the tree an old man
in a borrowed jacket
with a plastic bag,
sitting or kneeling
against the trunk.
The mud has embraced his movements.
(. . .) (*Someone* 33)

Bearing in mind that Kassabova's writings accommodate diverse subject positions, ranging from forcefully displaced persons to cosmopolitan travelers, it is unsurprising that her poems contain the overlapping themes of love, war, migration, voluntary displacement, hypocrisies of tourism, foreign identities and other languages, and nature and society. Her poetry is both exophonic and ecocritical, with pronounced references to multiple cultures and their contemporary realities. It finds emplacement in language, compares war with pollution that "falls like smog / over the cherished ecology" (32), and exposes human indifference and sensationalism, concluding that "[w]e eat our plastic breakfast and read / in yesterday's paper how / a visual artist awaits / the next man-made disaster" (35). The overlaying of representations of culture and nature can thus be contextualized and interpreted within what Nolan recognizes as *culturenature* and introduces as *unnatural ecopoetics*, claiming that "unnatural ecopoetics offers a critical lens that focuses on the methods by which poets express nonmaterial cultural, historical, political, and personal elements of environmental experience along with material objects and spaces through self-reflexive language and experimental forms" (29). Unnatural ecopoetics certainly resonates with exophonic ecopoetics in terms of "culturenature" and language experimentation. Apart from tackling broad civilizational issues, it acknowledges exophony in all its aspects as a means of transcending language boundaries.

In his 2006 article "A Transnational Poetics," Jahan Ramazani claims that poetry in English from the modernist era to the present has been "styled and shaped" by various "globe-traversing influences, energies, and resistances" (332). A good number of canonical modernist cross-cultural poets such as Yeats, Stein, Pound, and H.D. "translated their frequent geographic displacement and transcultural alienation into a poetics of bricolage and translocation, dissonance and defamiliarization," visibly defying national literary genealogies (333). The modernists' polyglossia and syncretic allusiveness seen as additional "practices of displacement" have likewise helped "define an alternative to nationalist and even to civilizational ideologies" (336). Due

to their translational and citational strategies, modernists represent the forerunners of contemporary multilingual poetry, and their syncretic expression is sometimes equated with exophonic practices.

For Marjorie Perloff, who attaches her primary definition of exophony to the modernist works of Eliot and Pound that are replete with allusions and intertextual references, contemporary exophonic poems contain more than one language in order to respond to "a world of relentless global communication" by "processing and absorbing the 'foreign' itself" (*Unoriginal* 129). While Perloff and Wright agree that exophonic writing today is a phenomenon of the digital age and global mobility, they seem to focus on different groups of writers: Perloff bases her research on canonical twentieth-century English-speaking poets as predecessors of all our (multilingual) contemporaries, regardless of their culture of origin, whereas Wright pays closer attention to particular cultures, describing the term *exophonic* as "an important shift in how we approach writing by non-native speakers" (40). Perloff's take on exophonic poetics is at the same time rooted in the past and present states of multilingualism, yet she seems to depoliticize current contexts in poetry by "[r]ooting exophonic poetics in the textual rootlessness of the internet" (Dowling 9). While Perloff's increasing preoccupation with eclectic online journals, blogs, and poetry domains is certainly useful for brainstorming new interpretative frameworks in the realm of poetry and poetics (*A Critic* 48), she appears to avoid deeper engagement with multifarious economic, social, geopolitical, and environmental contexts of a rising number of contemporary writers whose exophony is not necessarily citational, intertextual, and collagic, but primarily exophonic and performed by those who are voicing themselves from outside their first languages. Born in Austria and exophonic herself, Marjorie Perloff is one of the many highly influential literary figures who have successfully expressed themselves in additional languages. Conrad's, Nabokov's, Murakami's, and Hemon's Englishes, Beckett's French and Lahiri's Italian, to name but a few, are far from being their mother tongues. Yet the works written in them are widely acclaimed for introducing novel-

ties on thematic, linguistic, and stylistic levels. While prose is generally more popular than poetry, it is now refreshing to witness an increasing number of exophonic poets of displacement and alterity whose experiments with culture-translation and self-reinvention, rhythms and wordplay reflect various environmental and geopolitical changes in today's world of transnational mobility.

Asserting that "transnational human and cultural flows" have presented a continual and "strong stimulus to contemporary US poetry" in terms of introducing European surrealism, Asian fixed poetic forms, poetry in translation, and various poetic borrowings and exchanges, Ramazani points at the emergence of poets like Charles Simic (b. 1938), who were "born and reared elsewhere" (346), but who evidently enriched both the United States and transnational poetry arena by voicing themselves from an exophonic and environmentally aware position. Emigrating from Yugoslavia to the United States in the 1940s as a child survivor of World War II, Charles Simic, the 2007–2008 U.S. Poet Laureate, has contributed to modern and contemporary poetry in English by creating a unique poetics of displacement that places him among the most original voices in Anglo-American poetry. Introducing surreal yet familiar and homely images of estrangement that defy easy classification and belonging to any particular poetry school or style, "Simic's poetry is not read with specific critical vocabularies in mind" (Hart 200). Critics have generally attempted to read his poems within the contexts of both Yugoslav and American poetry, paying particular attention to the influences created by the poet's translations of East European authors, such as Vasko Popa and Ivan Lalić. Simic's exclusive position within American poetry canon is usually compared to that of Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, and W. C. Williams (Hart 201) and, more recently, to many other well-known English-speaking poets including Louise Glück, Tony Hoagland, Sharon Olds, Adam Zagajewski, Sherman Alexie, and Terrance Hayes. Depicting these contemporaries as "three-dimensional poets," David Kirby claims that the plasticity of their oeuvre stems from their balanced focus on wisdom, intellectual challenge,

and humor, while emotion expressed in the adaptability of poetic voices permeates all of them (435). Simic's poetry is thus often read as "a discursive space where Eastern European folk poetry, French Surrealism, and American Transcendentalism converge" (Hart 202). What is particularly interesting is that more recent criticism tends to emphasize Simic's English with a Slavic accent, which is "coherent and smooth" yet "delivered as a second language speaker" (Hawkins).

Acknowledging the complexity of conveying life experiences in two mutually complementary languages, Diana Engelmann rightly observes that "the voices of the foreign and of the mother tongue memory still echo in many [of Simic's] poems" (44), enabling a "binary vision" (45) that embodies a duality of exile in which the poems are at the same time "authentic statements of the contemporary American sensibility and vessels of internal translation, offering a passage to what is silent and foreign" (47). By claiming that "[i]n any Simic landscape — big city, New Hampshire countryside, or the memories of Serbian villages and the war-torn streets of Belgrade — the unexpected patterns of imagery turn back to a place or origin" (45), Engelmann points at transnational and transhistorical intersections between language and environment, society and nature. That such duplicities of homeland / hostland imagery expressed in exophonic texts accommodating bicultural and multicultural traditions have a solid ecocritical potential is particularly discernible in Simic's eco-conscious poems in which the speaker's self is at once individual and collective as well as introspective, critical, and urgent. It is interesting to notice that, while most of his miniaturist conceptual poems are often viewed as "defining momentary stays against confusion" (Stitt 490–91), their plasticity allows for inscriptions of universal messages that incorporate spatial and ecocritical dimensions of displacement and non-belonging. Striking in their simplicity, Simic's poems offer a complex and unresolved position of the speaker who voices layered interactions within culturenature spaces:

Every morning I forget how it is.
I watch the smoke mount
In great strides above the city.
I belong to no one.

Then, I remember my shoes,
How I have to put them on,
How bending over to tie them up
I will look into the earth.

(*Looking*, "Poem" 3)

The poem's most ordinary title generalizes personal and particular details, juxtaposing the elusiveness of memory with a constancy of life purpose. Seemingly uprooted and residing in a polluted city, the speaker has to detect his roots in nature every day anew in order to feel alive and connected. As with this one, Simic's nature poems possess the imagist intensity of Dickinson's spiritual culturenature fragments that register environmental changes in an unimposing way. Sensing familiarity with the pre-modernist poet, Simic often converses with her philosophical concepts of place and abroadness (Bijelić 54–59), and even addresses her directly when concerned with changes in nature and ecological issues. Thus, while in the poem "Emily's Theme" the speaker complains that he "no longer recognize[s]" his "dear trees" because of a new "wintry light" and its transformative power (*Looking for Trouble*, 83), the more recent poem "Star Atlas" offers urgent commentaries on the media report of "the bleak and desolate northern regions / [o]f our planet" and on "the line of the unemployed / [w]inding around the globe," (*Scribbled in the Dark*, 69-70), anticipating natural calamities and social unrest. The speaker's inability to trace some "old gods" with soothing power who would be capable of maintaining equilibrium on earth is theatrically summarized in "The madness of it, Miss Dickinson!" which is the very first line of the poem. The absence of the "old gods," who have ostensibly kept humans and their playgrounds safe, is what disturbs the speaker whose surrealist images have tended to project amusement and tragedy at the same time. But besides

introducing the overtly sinister tones that capture the ongoing realities of human alienation and environmental disasters, Simic's ecopoetic and exophonic strength lies exactly in his casual surrealism that playfully tackles large and serious issues in domestic and everyday settings, as in the poem "Mother Tongue":

That's the one the butcher
Wraps in a newspaper
And throws on the rusty scale
Before you take it home

Where a black cat will leap
Off the cold stove
Licking its whiskers
At the sound of her name

(*Jackstraws* 13)

Keeping in mind that writing outside of the mother tongue is closely linked to linguistic experimentation with authors' mental blueprints, cultural origins, and spaces of displacement, it can be argued that surrealist images go hand in hand with exophonic writing, allowing for non-standard interpretations and new critical vocabularies. The presence of neosurrealism as one of the many directions of contemporary exophony is also palpable in Kapka Kassabova's early poems, especially in "Lemon Tree Witnessing Man Being Built In" (*Someone* 40) and "Embracing the umbrella" (44), in which elements of nature, culture, and exophonic writing strangely combine to contribute to eco-awareness and displacement matters. Apart from its surrealist tendencies, exophonic poetry authored by displaced East European poets can be seen as translingual exploration of local and foreign landscapes and their verbal interactions as well as the "expression of hybrid, multi-layered, transformative literary spaces" (Sofronieva 35). This resonates with what Stephanie Sandler considers to be the most radical streak in a poetry canon formation: "the production of [national] literature in another language

entirely" (359), through which writers draw on other cultures' nature and heritage in the process of reconstructing their own.

Along with Simic and Kassabova, whose poems and single lines illustrate their engagement with exophonic ecopoetics, there is an increasing number of English-writing poets of displacement who also originate from Eastern Europe and Eurasia and whose works can be read from diverse exophonic and ecocritical perspectives. Among them are Nina Živančević (b. 1957), Katia Kapovich (b. 1960), Biljana D. Obradović (b. 1961), Ilya Kaminsky (b. 1977), Ana Božičević (b. 1977), and a good number of others. Having migrated for political, economic, or any other reasons, and often identifying as transcultural authors and cosmopolitan travelers, they have already made remarkable contributions to both Anglo-American and transnational poetry. While some of their works are highly praised and some critically underdiscussed, they demonstrate different levels of (trans)nationalism, ranging from national nostalgia to becoming a world citizen. Describing exophonic practices as "those little thefts between languages, those strange angles of looking at another literature, 'slant' moments in speech, oddities and their music" (Greenwell 2019), Ilya Kaminsky, for example, "fiercely resist[s] being pigeonholed as a 'Russian poet' or an 'immigrant poet' or even an 'American poet'," asserting that he is "a human being," which is "a marvelous thing to be" (ibid.)

Drawing on Ramazani's remark that transnationalism as a term should be used with caution, acknowledging that "the cultures, locations, and identities connected or juxtaposed are themselves agglomerations of exceedingly complex origin" (353), I see the space of exophonic ecopoetics, its broad inclusiveness and fresh juxtapositions of various local, translocal, and global values and issues as a potent platform for transcultural expression. Informed by the concept of natureculture and by "unnatural ecopoetics" that "provides a bridge between ecocriticism's focus on physical environments and a broader interest in how the material and nonmaterial elements of en-

vironmental experiences come together on the page" (Nolan 356), I suggest that much of contemporary writing of displacement can be read through the prism of ecocriticism that recognizes Kaminsky's "strange angles of looking" and Wood's "powerful estranging effect" (10) produced by exophonic representations of mutually related social and environmental issues.

Works Cited

Adamson, Joni and Scott Slovic. "The Shoulders We Stand on: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism." *MELUS,* vol. 34, no. 2, 2009, pp. 5–24.

Aleksić, Tatjana. "Grief Can Only Be Written in One's Mother Tongue: Exile and Identity in the Work of David Albahari." *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*, edited by Agnieszka Gutthy, Peter Lang Publishing, 2009, pp. 155–74.

Bijelić, Tatjana. *Dickinsonian Intonations in Modern Poetry.* U of Banja Luka, 2018.

Bryson, Scott J. *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space, and Ecopoetry.* U of Iowa P, 2005.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Davidson, Michael. "Introduction: American Poetry, 2000-2009." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 52, no. 4, pp. 597–629.

Dowling, Sarah. *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood under Settler Colonialism*. U of Iowa P, 2018.

Engelmann, Diana. "'Speaking in Tongues': Exile and Internal Translation in the Poetry of Charles Simic." *The Antioch Review*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2004, pp. 44–47.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold From, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. U of Georgia P, 1996.

Greenwell, Garth. "Still Dancing: An Interview with Ilya Kaminsky." *Poets and Writers*, March/April 2019, www.pw.org/content/still_dancing_an_interview_with_ilya_kaminsky. Accessed 5 Feb. 2020.

Hart, Kevin. "Writing Things: Literary Property in Heidegger and Simic." *New Literary*

History, vol. 21, no. 1, 1989, pp. 199–214.

Hawkins, John Kendall. "Changing Light Bulbs in the Cosmos with Charles Simic." *CounterPunch*, September 6, 2019, www.counterpunch.org/2019/09/06/changing-light-bulbs-in-the-cosmos-with-charles-simic/. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

Heise, Ursula K. "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism." *PMLA*, vol. 128, no. 3, 2013, pp. 636–43.

Hron, Melaine. *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture*. U of Toronto P, 2009.

Kassabova, Kapka. *Someone else's life*. Bloodaxe Books, 2003.

---. "Interview and Poems: 'Refugees', 'Coming to Paradise', 'Immigrant Architectures', 'My Life in Two Parts', 'In the Shadow of a Bridge.'" *Creativity in Exile*, edited by Michael Hanne, Rodopi, 2004, pp. 135–40.

---. "Kapka Kassabova chats to us about her new book *Border and life behind the Iron Curtain.*" *The Café*, YouTube, 2018a, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-DoCBHozvA. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

---. "There is, in fact, no 'other side'. The border taught me this: Kapka Kassabova on the Future of Europe." *The Alternative UK*. July 5, 2018b, www.thealternative.org.uk/dailyalternative/2018/7/9/kassabova-on-europe- future-borders. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

Keller, Lynn. "Beyond Imagining, Imagining Beyond." *PMLA*, vol. 127, no. 3, 2012, pp. 579–85.

Kirby, David. "An 'Empty Prescription': Pleasure in Contemporary American Poetry." *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets*, edited by Mark Richardson, Cambridge UP, 2015, pp. 425–37.

Kostova, Ludmilla. "Writing across the Native/Foreign Divide: The Case of Kapka Kassabova's *Street Without a Name." Travel and Ethics – Theory and Practice*, edited by Corinne Fowler, Charles Forsdick, and Ludmilla Kostova, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, pp. 165–82.

Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1991.

Luca, Ioana. "Eastern European Exilic Trajectories in Post-1989 Life Writing." *The European Journal of Life Writing*, vol. II, 2013, pp. 61–80.

New, W. H. Land Sliding: *Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing*.

U of Toronto P, 1997.

Nolan, Sarah. *Unnatural Ecopoetics [Unlikely Spaces in Contemporary Poetry]*. Foreword by Scott Slovic, e-book, U of Nevada P, 2017.

Perloff, Marjorie. *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*. U of Chicago P, 2012.

---." 'A Critic of the Other Tradition,' interview with Hélène Aji and Antoine Cazé." *Poetics in a New Key: Interviews and Essays*, edited by David Jonathan Y. Bayot, U of Chicago P, 2015, pp. 28–49.

Ramazani, Jahan. "A Transnational Poetics". *American Literary History*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2006, pp. 332–59.

Sandler, Stephanie. "Creating the Canon of the Present." *Twentieth-Century Russian Poetry*, edited by Katharine Hodgson, Joanne Shelton, and Alexandra Smith, Open Book Publishers, JSTOR, 2017, pp. 393–423, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1sq5v63.16. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

Simic, Charles. *Scribbled in the Dark*. HarperCollins, 2017.

---. *Jackstraws*. Harcourt, 1999.

---. *Looking for Trouble*. Faber and Faber, 1997.

Skinner, Jonathan. "Statement for 'New Nature Writing Panel' at 2005 AWP (Vancouver)." *Ecopoetics*, vol. 4, no. 5, 2004/5, pp. 127–29.

Sofronieva, Tzveta. "Un-lost in Translation." S*horeless Bridges: Sout-East European Writing in Diaspora*, edited by Elka Agoston-Nikolova, Rodopi, 2010, pp. 27–40.

Stitt, Peter. "Simic, Charles." *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, edited by Ian Hamilton, Oxford UP, 1994, pp. 490-91.

Wheatley, David. *Contemporary British Poetry*. Palgrave, 2015.

Wood, Gillen D'Arcy. "What Is Sustainability Studies?" *American Literary History*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–15.

Wright, Chantal. "Writing in 'Grey Zone': Exophonic Literature in Contemporary Germany." *GFL – German as a foreign language*, no. 3, 2008, pp. 26–42.

Stipe Grgas
University of Zagreb

What Has Changed in Nature and in the Economy?

The author begins this article by describing the changed priorities of the present: whereas previously attention was focused on social issues, today it is the environment that has become the focus of human concerns. Although the impact of human actions on nature has been noted in the past, the author argues that today this impact is unprecedented. This can be seen, for example, in the way that contemporary engagements with the archive foreground the ecological issue. The author illustrates his disagreement with this practice by glancing at ecologically-minded re-readings of Karl Marx. Turning to American Studies as the disciplinary background of his argument, the author explains the reasons for this focus on Marx. The next step of the paper explores the ecological presence in American Studies before the conclusion, in which the author engages certain works of fiction and shows how he had previously not given sufficient weight to the ecological problematic.

Key words: nature, economy, ecology, Karl Marx, American Studies, negativity

> The message was: disorder always won in the end. The idea that man could order the world to his own design was the most pitiful fairy tale ever told.
>
> (Rich 236–37)

One of the transformations that I will be addressing can be formulated with a conditional: if, in the not so distant past, it was possible to address nature and the economy as separate yet related domains, this is no longer the case. If the economy has always been conceptualized as a sphere of human

existence characterized by dynamics and change, nature, for the most part, was viewed as relatively stable, too big and too (in)different to be affected by human activities. Or so it seemed, until, starting a few decades back, more and more parameters have forced us to attend to the interaction between nature and the economy in a way that puts to question the fundamentals of both categories. To put it in a nutshell: ecological considerations, to name the issue which inevitably surfaces when speaking about nature and the economy today, have insinuated themselves into our thinking about the human and non-human world with an urgency which baffles established paradigms of understanding and explanation. By way of an introduction, I will say a few words about this urgency, how it manifests itself, and how it puts to naught thinking that always seeks historical precedents in coping with what is new.

I strongly disagree with readings of the present that simply see it as more of the same, that downplay the differences the present shows in comparison with conditions of the past. I agree with those who, like Arran E. Gare in the following passage, point to a condition which taxes not only our epistemological capacities but also our habitual ways of living:

> Once analyses of postmodernity and modernity are conjoined with analyses of the roots of the global environmental crisis, it will become clear that what we are facing is a unique historical event. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx argued that 'only rarely and under quite special conditions is a society able to adopt a critical attitude towards itself'. The situation we are in is one of those quite special conditions in which not merely a society but the whole of modern civilization is being forced to adopt a critical attitude towards itself, a critical attitude even more profound than the critique by Marx of capitalism in the nineteenth century. (2)

Although, to paraphrase Marx, I argue that our society has not adopted a sufficiently critical attitude toward itself, I will also show that Marx in relation to this problematic does not provide that much help. I point this out to distance myself from what I judge are too facile political responses. The

transformation is such that we cannot rely upon these. On the level of scholarly deliberation – and it would be pretentious to think that we are doing anything more – the environmental crisis forces our strategies of knowledge to refocus the object that we deem as worthy of study and to reappraise the thinkers whose thinking we hold to be relevant.

The three words that set the guidelines for the occasion where the following was delivered – transformation, nature, and economy – could not fail to bring to mind the title of Karl Polanyi's master work *The Great Transformation*. Polany's exploration of capitalism and his diagnosis of the subordination of social relations to the market are well known. Although many of his prognostications have proven wrong, his insights regarding the absolutism of the economy in today's world are to the point and deserve our attention. In this new absolutism, the economy seems to be totally disembedded from social concerns. As Polany wrote: "To allow the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment . . . would result in the demolition of society . . . . Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed" (60). On the basis of this passage, it is obvious that Polany was aware of the impact the logic of the market had on the environment although overall he prioritized the societal cost. The transformation I discuss here upturns this hierarchy.

Some thirty years ago, Thomas Wägenbaur, in an essay titled "The Construction of Nature: A Critique of Ecological Reason," diagnosed the change as follows:

> Since the beginning of the Seventies nature has replaced society as the referent for critical discourse. With the decline of Marxism nature and not the impoverishment of the proletarian masses became the focus of critical attention. Every discourse, from advertisement to politics, from nuclear energy to

> organically-grown produce appropriated nature as a paradigm. The truth of ecology became the ruling doctrine. (224)

Concerning the degradation of nature, Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*, a book whose title references both nature and the economy, wrote,

> But today nature is drawing away from us, to say the very least. It is becoming impossible to escape the notion that nature is being murdered by 'anti-nature' – by abstraction, by signs and images, by discourse, as also by labour and its products. Along with God, nature is dying. 'Humanity' is killing both of them – and perhaps committing suicide into the bargain. (70–71)

To the point of my argument, the geographer Mike Hulme holds that the relationship between climate and society, in place throughout history and prehistory, "has now taken a more intimate turn. Human actions, globally aggregated, are changing the composition of the atmosphere, which alters the functioning of the climate system. Future climates will not be like past climates" ("Geographical Work"). These three pronouncements illustrate how priorities have changed. In all of them there is a sense of urgency and foreboding that I share.

Is There a Consensus?

Doing justice to the issue one must acknowledge that there are those who are skeptical about the impact of human action on the planet. Thus Peter Branner, in his *The Atlantic* article entitled "The Anthropocene is a Joke," calls into question the whole notion of the Anthropocene: "On ecological timescales, human civilization is an event, not an epoch" (Branner). With this distinction, Branner is accusing human thought of nearsightedness, of being unable to see the broader temporal context. However, if that context is extended to the length Branner does in the article, there is hardly anything that can be said about the human condition *per se*. It dwindles into insignificance. I will

merely add that the author, by using the word "event," unwittingly assigns significance to human actions because events as such designate a turning point, a happening after which things are not the same. Jan Zalasiewicz, professor of geography at the University of Leicester, is not in a joking mood when, in the summary statement of the "Working Group on the Anthropocene," he contends that if one looks at the main parameters of the "Earth-system metabolism," things started changing dramatically with industrialization (Zalasiewicz). An article in the journal *Nature* written by Anthony D. Barnosky and others begins with the following contention: "Humans now dominate Earth, changing it in ways that threaten its ability to sustain us and other species. This realization has led to a growing interest in forecasting biological responses on all scales from local to global" (Barnosky et al. 52). The scientists in *Nature* write of a "global-scale state shift." With a backward glance at the long-scale time of the earth, they state, "Today conditions are very different because global-scale forcings including (but not limited to) climate change have emerged as a direct result of human activities" (Barnosky et al. 54). When they speak of "anthropogenic forcings" and when in their conclusion they suggest strategies to postpone cataclysmic effects, it goes without saying that these activities can be subsumed under the rubric of the economy.

In his book *The Entropy of Capitalism* (2011), Robert Biel offers an interesting explanation of the relation between the economy and nature which can be used to put the state of the present in perspective. Biel writes that, in the nineteenth and even during most of the twentieth century, it was possible to neglect the damage done to the environment or it could be mitigated through legislation. His explanation accords with what has been said so far:

> The social contradictions were thus the most obvious, but even in this case, their intensity was underestimated because they could be exported into the physical environment, through 'growth'. In this sense, there was a 'sequestered' form of ecological decay, itself in a sense a transmuted form of so-

> cial contradiction, which is now exacting its payback in the form of climate change, massive hazard in the food system etc. All of this is, in a way, a result of capitalist society turning its back on the only free resource: the interaction between the natural world and human capacity. (35)

Of particular interest is the notion that societal problems could be "exported" into the environment. Essentially, this is what economic activity does. Biel generalizes by contending that this has been the "escape route" for capitalism: when the social sphere gets too unmanageable, the economy simply increases ecological degradation to compensate for this shortcoming. In the next sentence, Biel diagnoses what today has gone wrong in that relation: "But crucially, this escape route is today much less open than at any time in the past" (161).

It needs to be said that economists who work outside the framework of the mainstream economic paradigm have noted the imbrication of the economy and nature and how both of these entities exemplify what Biel designates as entropic processes. The accusations leveled at mainstream economics point to the assumptions of its logic, which as a rule does not acknowledge the detrimental impact of human activity on the surrounding world. This is the bottom line of the essays assembled in the "Economics and the Ecosystem" issue of the journal *Real-World Economics Review* (March 19, 2019). In their introduction, Jamie Morgan and Edward Fullbrook warn that "humanity may be sleepwalking toward catastrophe" but that the "very form and function of our political economies resists recognizing the seriousness of the situation":

> we have been socialized to conflate larger economies with necessarily better economies and to consider expansionary economies as a predicate of technological solutions to induced problems of economic activity. At the same time, we have been discouraged from thinking about the basic incompatibility of an ever-expanding material economy within a finite world. (3–4)

The mantras of "growthism" prevent us from recognizing that incompatibility and reduce nature to a mere resource; economic formulas model it as forever subservient and available to human enterprise. If, as Edward Fullbrook writes, "in the 19th century, when today's mainstream economics was invented, the global economy was too small to have observable effects on the ecosphere and none were anticipated" (33–34), things have hugely changed and evidence of this change is all too observable.

Singularity of the Transformation and the Archive

These remarks suffice to indicate that the ongoing transformation of the relation between nature and the economy is a singular event, in the sense I used the word event above. The sheer size and expanse of the contemporary economy dwarfs the economies of the past. Growth has come with a cost. Therefore, Andreas Malm's remark in his influential book *Fossil Capital* that there were "sporadic forebodings" (3) of possible fallouts of the industrial revolution in the literature of the time needs to be amended. Today, these forebodings are far from sporadic. They have become the rule. As Steve Rayner in his foreword to Mike Hulme's book *Why We Disagree about Climate Change* writes,

> Climate is more than just a coercive resource to be mobilized behind different visions of humanity and its future. It has become the key narrative within which political issues from the local to the global are framed. In that sense, debate around climate has succeeded debate around capital and social class as the organizing theme of political discourse in contemporary society. (xxiii)

Below I will tangentially touch upon the politics that I see ensuing from the acknowledgement that climate has become the key narrative of our times. Before doing so, I will show how that narrative impacts upon the discourses and scholarly formations within which I have chosen to discuss the transformation.

One of the ways that impact manifests itself is in the practice of rereading the archive for warning signs. By reframing extant texts into the environmental problematic, these texts are made to yield content that in previous readings might have gone unnoticed. It turns out that ecological/climate issues are to be found in the unlikeliest of places. Thus, when Mike Hulme gives, as he writes, a "genealogy of climate change," he points out that Aristotle's student Theophrastus in the third century B.C. "first observed and documented local changes in climate induced by human agency" (*Why We Disagree* 37). I will not follow up on Hulme's observation by searching for other figures who were conscious of the human-nature relation. I will illustrate this practice of rereading in the case of Karl Marx. I do so not because, as will be shown, I think an ecological rereading of his work is particularly convincing but because I think his thinking on capital is still relevant. Having said that, I think Marx's analysis was, as Edward Fullbrook contends, attuned to the nineteenth century and that he could not have anticipated the effects the economy would have on the ecosphere in subsequent time.

Robert Biel in his book offhandedly remarks that "Marx based his theory on the contradiction between capitalism and nature" (152). Although there is no doubt that this theoretical context helps Biel to chart the "entropies" of capitalism, he does not dwell in depth on Marx and ecology. To show how Marx has been reread as an ecologically minded thinker, we have to go elsewhere. One of the most-cited sources to espouse such a focus on Marx is John Bellamy Foster's study *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (2000). Early in his argument, Foster quotes geographer Massimo Quaini, who wrote, "Marx denounced the spoliation of nature before a modern bourgeois ecological conscience was born" (qtd. in Foster 9). Foster contends that Marx from his earliest years "analyzed the human alienation from nature in a sophisticated and ecologically sensitive form" (20). However, Foster is aware of other readings of Marx which contradict these evaluations. He quotes ecologist John Clark: "Marx's Promethean . . . 'man' is a being who is not at home in nature, who does not see the earth as the 'household' of ecology. He is an

indomitable spirit who must subject nature in his quest for self-realization" (qtd. in Foster 134). Clark's observations are nearer to my own understanding of Marx than those who ecologize him.

Marx employed the concept of metabolism (*Stoffwechsel*) to define the labor process as a process between man and nature. Foster adds, "Yet an 'irreparable rift' had emerged in this metabolism as a result of capitalist relations of production and the antagonistic separation of town and country" (141). This is a position shared by all who build upon Marx's insight and who blame capitalism for its impact on the environment. This critique of capitalism is valid, but what many of those who adhere to it fail to see is that the order of real existing socialism and the revolutionary project it was a part of are no less to blame for their treatment of nature. I disagree with those who seek to claim Marx for the ecological cause. Ecology was not a top agenda issue in Marxist thought. Let me illustrate this with local evidence. In the 1983 Marx symposium in Dubrovnik, where philosophers debated the relevance of Marx in the then contemporary world, the ecological question was absent excepting its mention in the contribution by the Serbian philosopher Mihailo Marković, who contended that Marx's critique

> is inadequate in so far as it does not take into account a natural barrier to ongoing capitalist expansion. An exponential growth of consumption of the earth's resources and of pollution of natural environment is not possible beyond a certain limit to which we quickly approach. This ecological argument which is so important today was not present in Marx's critique. (Petrović and Schmied-Kowarzik 36)

I find this to be a convincing evaluation. Marković was not constrained by dogmatic interpretations of Marx and thus his reading has a particular weight and points clearly to the datedness of Marx's analysis.

Let me add circumstantial proof for this contention. Marx could not have been farsighted enough to foresee the changes that were in store for the

emergent economic system, let alone its impact on nature. One has to keep in mind that he gleaned his evidence from available sources. Thus, it is worthwhile recalling that one of these was the news magazine *The Economist*. Although I am not going to reread the archive of *The Economist*, it is fair to say that ecological concerns were not in the forefront of its attention. But, in retrospect, and in accord with my argument, it is evident that the environment and the climate have, in recent years, figured more and more in its coverage. It is indicative that the September 2019 of the journal (September 21–27, 2019) published a "climate issue" featuring a cover that visually represented the world's average annual temperatures since the mid-nineteenth century. In the lead article, we read that this span of time

> saw world wars, technological innovation, trade on an unprecedented scale and a staggering creation of wealth. But those complex histories and the simplifying stripes share a common cause. The changing climate of the planet and the remarkable growth in human numbers and riches both stem from the combustion of billions of tones of fossil fuel to produce industrial power, electricity, transport, heating and, more recently, computation. ("The Climate Issue")

I cite *The Economist* to show that the issue we are dealing with has seeped down into a journal which hardly questions today's economic order.

Into American Studies

I have touched upon Marx's ecology because, in a roundabout way, it has a bearing on American Studies. Summarily stated, particularly as Michael Denning (1986) explained, Marxism can be viewed as the enabling other of American Studies. One can go so far as to say that American Studies as a scholarly practice was constituted and developed as an antipode to Marxism. What strikes me in that relation is that the two systems, which vied during the second part of the twentieth century, shared an ecological unconcern. Clive

L. Spash and Tone Smith write,

> A long-running claim amongst mainstream economists, defenders of unregulated capitalism and those favoring a regulated productivist economy has been that human ingenuity can find substitutes for all resources and technology can solve all problems allowing humanity to change and adapt to anything. These arguments are made in almost total ignorance of how the economy interacts with ecosystems and impacts their structure and functioning, how dependent economies are on the flow of low entropy materials and energy and what are the basic limits to humans as biological animals. Indeed even ignorance itself is ignored and reduced down to risk and probabilities. (212)

Little needs to be added to this pronouncement. To reiterate: the project of American Studies was conceived as an identitarian project opposing the cultural work of the Soviet system. As such, it reiterated values and realities which differentiated the United States from the rest of the world. It is indicative that environmental issues did not figure prominently in its self-conceptions, that it shared an unconcern regarding the devastation of nature with its enabling other. An explanation of this convergence is to be found in the ideology of growth and development shared by both world systems. In other words, both systems espoused the same metabolism when it came to the man–nature relationship.

Keeping this in mind, it comes as no surprise that, in the strict sense of the word, environmental concerns have not figured very prominently in the American Studies tradition. In his review article "Necrocracy in America," Mathew Schneider-Meyerson contends that American Studies has for the most part ignored "climate change and the still-accelerating consumption of fossil fuels despite our awareness of the catastrophic environmental and human consequences" (530). This is a grave fault, considering, as he writes, that "Future historians may remember the United States in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries principally as the progenitor of the rising seas, extreme weather events, volatile climate, and acidified, littered, oceans that

plague their times" (529). In his notes, he writes that *The Journal of American Studies* and *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* have paid the most attention to energy and climate change. I have perused these journals but have not found a theoretically informed purchase on the ecological issue from the standpoint of American Studies. An exception to this absence of references to the environmental issue in American Studies is Robert S. Levine's article "American Studies in an Age of Extinction," where "global warming" is mentioned in his survey of "visions of the end" in American culture, which, according to Levine, is pervaded by concerns that life on the planet may be coming to an end. Levine writes, "But it is human-induced climate change that has generated the greatest concern about the possibility that the planet will soon be unable to support life" (161). Mathew Schneider-Meyerson and Robert S. Levine work with different archives and reach different conclusions. But if we give the matter some thought, it turns out that the ecological issue is part and parcel of American Studies.

Could it be otherwise, considering the role that land, geography, and nature has played in providing images, metaphors, and narratives constitutive of American identity? Not having much truck with historical duration, the self-projections of the young Republic played themselves out on the seemingly inexhaustible continent. I will add to this that pioneering work in American Studies has customarily downplayed the importance of the economy and business. However, this is too much of a simplification. The economy can be said to make a return synecdochically in at least one of the founding texts, that is, in Leo Marx's metaphor of the machine in the garden. As Marx puts it near the end of his study, "The contrast between the machine and the pastoral ideal dramatizes the great issue of our culture. It is the germ . . . of the most final of all generalizations about America" (353). I will return to Leo Marx, but if we recall his argument, it is obvious that his study staged the scene for the transformation that we are now witnessing. I will add that, in a 2008 article, Leo Marx recognized how in the 1970s, "with the onset of the 'ecological crisis', the refurbished, matter-of-fact environment took over a large part of

the niche in public discourse hitherto occupied by the word nature" (Marx). With the later statement, he makes explicit what was implicitly present in his founding text.

Whether as a part of self-legitimating rhetoric or as an archive of landscapes representing American specificity, nature is a constant motif in American Studies. Whether as a wilderness, a garden, or a continental expanse, external nature provided the stage for the development of the American project. Different readings of the American experience provide a chronology of how those engaged in that project related to nature. That relation, manifested in land proprietorship, in turning nature into ground to be tilled, in using machines to traverse distances in nature, *et cetera*, gives a chronology of American economic history. Put otherwise, in the United States and earlier in the colonies, nature was always transformed to accommodate the dynamic of economic growth. In one of the founding texts of American studies, "Nature and the National Idea," Perry Miller contended that *the* American theme was that of Nature versus civilization. In the article, Miller emphasized and gave an explanation of how nature functioned in the American imagination and how it was being endangered by the economic calculus. The function of nature in the discourses he explored was ideological: "The most utilitarian conquest known to history had somehow to be viewed not as inspired by a calculus of rising land values and investments but (despite the orgies of speculation) as an immense exertion of the spirit" (207). America was projected as "Nature's nation," notwithstanding the oxymoronic semantics of the phrase and the economic realities that were bringing the devastation of nature into view.

Politics, Economic Orthodoxy, and Nature Transformed

If, as Mathew Schneider-Meyerson contends, the United States will be remembered in the future as the "progenitor" of ecological disasters, this will be so because of the success of its "utilitarian conquest." Doing American Studies, we register that unprecedented success but must remember that it

contributed, more than other societies did, to the transformations of nature we are now witnessing. As Robert Biel formulates this, "it is the ravages of capitalism's past excess which now return to haunt, not just the mode of production itself . . . but in a broader sense the future of humanity" (126). Capitalism's excesses are not equally distributed. On the next page of his book, Biel informs us that "China despite being the world's most populous country and even with its recent extremely rapid industrialization, has contributed less than 8% of the total emissions of carbon dioxide from energy use since 1850, compared with 29% for the United States." He summarizes:

> What this effectively means is that the South suffers twice: first, from the legacy of the destruction exported to it while colonization and neocolonialism were fueling the North's industrial order; secondly, through the payback on the entropy which was then being exported to the future, and now returns as climate change. It should be noted that projections suggest that the effect will be uneven in the opposite sense to the responsibility, i.e. the South which caused less of the problem will suffer more of it: the map of estimated mortality attributable to climate change exactly follows the North–South divide. (127)

If American Studies includes in its agenda the transformation under discussion, it has to acknowledge the disproportionate impact its object of study has had on that transformation. Max Koch is clear about the inequality of rich and poor countries facing the ecological crisis, the case being that rich countries

> do not only have the bulk of historical responsibility for the ecological crisis, but also continue to consume an amount of environmental resources that cannot be generalized to the rest of the planet without further crossing planetary boundaries. For these countries especially economic growth as the top policy priority would need to be deprioritized and replaced by biophysical parameters as well as by a general policy orientation on basic needs satisfaction. (99)

As things stand now, it is difficult to imagine that the deprioritization of growth will figure in either rich or poor countries. Current policies follow a different trajectory and marginalize activism prompted by calls for ecological justice.

In their chronology of the politics of climate change, Nathaniel Rich and George Steinmetz mention Ronald Reagan, who rolled back environmental protection by appointing officials to the Interior Department and the EPA who supported fossil-fuel production and deregulation (Rich and Steinmetz). But Reagan was only following in the steps of Richard Nixon, who had said,

> There are only seven per cent of the people in the world living in the United States, and we use thirty percent of all the energy. That isn't bad; that is good. That means we are the richest, strongest people in the world, and that we have the highest standards of living in the world. That is why we need so much energy and may it always be that way. (qtd. in Biel 134)

Let me add to this the famous pronouncement made by George W. H. Bush back in 1992, just before the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro: "The American way of life is not up for negotiations. Period" (Deen). The present occupant of the White House would doubtlessly concur with these assessments. While working on this paper, I read an article on 12 January 2020 in the *Guardian* written by Ross Barkan entitled "Trump has savaged the environment. The planet cannot afford a second term" (Barkan). These pronouncements are relevant for American Studies because they show how entrenched is an economic system that would have to be modified to meet the needs of a nature transformed. I mention this because of the two realities that I have addressed so far – nature and the economy – it is only the economy that can be transformed in order to cope with what it itself has done to nature.

Following up on this, American Studies can explore how environmental issues put to question the activism practitioners of the discipline from

the United States assign to it. In his article Mathew Schneider-Mayerson writes, "A radically different climate is not simply another issue deserving of concern but a likely catalyst for the kind of massive social and political destabilization that would negate the important cultural, social, and political work American studies has accomplished since its inception" (538–39). I understand the word "destabilization" here to mean the transformation from the socio-political sphere to the current focus on the non-human world. Simply put, questions of racial, class, ethnic, or sexual justice disappear in the face of the apocalypse. We feel helpless in the face of suprahuman forces and processes. Not everybody agrees with this diagnosis. In an interview indicatively titled "It is time to try out an 'ecological Leninism'," Andreas Malm critiques the notion of the Anthropocene because he wants us to see that not everybody, but only some humans, have caused the mess. He comments, "If the human species is the culprit, there's little we can do about it. If dominant classes and contingent social relations are the problem, then we can attack it at the root" (Malm). But can we?

I have doubts about any kind of ameliorative action. But, needless to say, the revolutionary ethos finds it hard to accept this passivity. The case of Bernard Stiegler is illustrative. In his book *The Neganthropocene*, Stiegler writes,

> Halfway through the second decade of the twenty-first century, we, non-inhuman beings that we are, find ourselves trying to live within a state of emergency that is permanent, universal, and unpredictable, and that seems bound to become unliveable. We all feel this urgency. But most of the time we deny it – except when we have no choice but to observe its immediate and disastrous effects upon our everyday existences, which tend thereby to find themselves reduced to subsistence, that is, to survival. (204)

However, Stiegler's intellectual ethos cannot accept this reduction: "A leap beyond this entropic situation is required, beyond this state of fact, a bifur-

cation from this chaos that would be capable of opening up a new era, upon which we shall bestow the name, 'Neganthropocene'" (141). Taking into account scientific evidence and the pronouncements of those who are deciding our future, I think this is wishful thinking. I share with Alexander M. Stoner and Andony Melathopolous doubts regarding the capacity of society to self-consciously transform itself. Here is what they say:

> While a person like James Watts would have held the aspirations for the free development and transformation of society from the constraints of feudalism – that is, the idea and political project for freedom – our moment is marked by a dramatic attenuation, or even distrust, that such transformation is even desirable. (20)

Corroborating my contention regarding the singularity of the present, I hold that, unlike Watts, I recognize, in agreement with Moishe Postone, "a profound sense of helplessness regarding the capacity of society to self-consciously transform itself in ways that are not predetermined from the outset" (Postone). If, as Erik Swyngedouw reminds us, apocalyptic imaginaries have been with us for a long time, this gives us no comfort because, as he goes on to add, "present-day millennialism preaches an apocalypse without the promise of redemption" (218). The implications for human action are far reaching: "The environmentally apocalyptic future, forever postponed, neither promises redemption nor does it possess a name: it is pure negativity" (219).

In a paradoxical way, a mutation of the economy, namely its financialization, has devised one of the rare procedures for dealing with this negativity. Robert Biel succinctly describes it as the process by which finance capital drags humanity towards disaster "by picking up the signals of crisis and distorting them into positive feedback" (164). This is no place to go into how insurance and finance make a profit out of ecological disasters, but it is evident that what is at stake here is an approach that does not propose transforming

the economy but applies the logic that got us here in the first place to changed circumstances. The quote at the beginning of my paper comes from Nathaniel Rich's novel *Odds Against Tomorrow*, which thematizes precisely this issue. The "future-affected anxiety disorder" (51) of the main character, the portrayal of a world that persists in its normalcy until the event which makes this impossible, the images of "a new world we've made" (147) – all these and many other motifs in the novel sketch the world into which we have landed. Rich's novel is a latecomer to a lineage of American writers who, as Leo Marx writes in the epilogue to *The Machine in the Garden*, "have dwelt upon the contradiction between the rural myth and technological fact" (354). If the writers Marx chose dwelt upon the contradiction between nature and the economy, numerous contemporary writers do not dwell upon the relation but narrate how it has morphed into a no-win situation.

My rereadings

Richard Powers's last novel, *Overstory*, upturns our habitual priorities. It focuses upon and narrates a world of trees. Here are two samplings from the opening page of the novel: first, "*The several hundred kinds of hawthorn laugh at the single name they're forced to share*" (3); and the second, "All the ways you imagine us – bewitched mangroves up on stilts, a nutmeg's inverted spade, gnarled baja elephant trunks, the straight-up missile of sal – are always amputations. Your kind never sees us whole. You miss the half of it, and more. There's always as much below ground as above" (3). Simply put, Powers reveals that human enterprise simplifies the complexity of the earth and brings it "to its rationalized end" (21). Trees fare badly in that end: "Still the Age of Wood. Cheapest priceless stuff that ever has been" (185). For my purpose it is important to note that Powers's ecological novel intermittently gestures to the economic processes transforming nature.

This prompted me to go back to his novel *Gain*, perhaps the most focused fictional effort to narrate American capitalism, and see whether nature in the earlier novel figures in the description of the economy. Reveal-

ingly, even trees appeared in the earlier text in asides such as "if somebody needs the trees to get well, to hell with the owl" (*Gain*, 151) or later in the novel, somewhere on the coast of British Columbia "machines receive these trees" (345). I will list a number of instances in the novel where the author explicitly mentions the relationship between nature and the economy. At the very beginning of the novel, we read that the town of Lacewood "thrived on alchemical transformations. Growth from bone meal and bat guano" (3–4). Concerning the railroad, it is stated that it "plowed into the frontier, as inevitable as the grave to which all expansion leads" (42). Another economic epoch is described as follows: "Life now headed, via a web of steam-cut canals, deep into the interior" (67). Elsewhere, echoes of our theme are to be found: "If Nature were no more than eternal transformation, Man's meet and right pursuit consisted of emulating her" (79). In a rhapsodic delivery on the telegraph, Powers writes, "For how many eons had insurmountable geography impeded man's business? Now the new American race had burst those shackles" (91). Nature references appear in Powers's rendering of economic creative destruction: "The waters had constantly to leave behind the landscape they drained, if ever they meant to reach open sea. So, too, nay forward-looking enterprise had to be ready to cast off what had once been its mainstay" (105–6). The dynamic of advancement and its impact on nature as waste is seen in the following: "Human progress had already taken a considerable toll. The very gas lamps that lifted the pall of night also issued a rising tide of coal tar treacle that threatened to drown the nation in advancement's sewage" (144–45). I add a generalization from the novel: "Commerce aimed at manipulating nature on a truly grand scale" (166). At one point in the diachrony of American capitalism, it is stated that "The earth had become a factory" (198). Nearing the end of the novel, we find explicit references to "global warming" (231) and "ecology" (341). Rereading *Gain*, I found in Powers references to the problematic which I think is the most pressing issue of the present. In my earlier reading, it was not there (Grgas). The urgency of the environmental issue changed the priorities of my readings. I will conclude on a personal note.

Namely, in the introduction to the collection of essays *The Construction of Nature*, Svend Erik Larsen and I wrote the following:

> When we nowadays say that nature is in crisis, what we mean is that the boundary between nature and culture has reached a critical point. Nature in itself is not going through a crisis. It can turn into a moorland, be swamped by the sea or freeze into icy wastes, as it has already done during the aeons of terrestrial history. However, nature that human culture is supposed to survive in and have responsibility for the positioning of its boundaries, is being choked to death. (Grgas and Larsen 7–8)

It is only the earlier-mentioned Thomas Wägenbaur, who in his two contributions to our collection explicitly addressed the ecological issues. From the present point of time – to update the deictic "nowadays" of some thirty years ago – I find it strange that the ecological thematic did not figure more promptly at the 1992 Alborg workshop. The above quote from our introduction shows that we were aware of the problem but, in retrospect, it seems not to have been a cause of existential anxiety – it was not "intimate" enough. The detachment which I now recognize in the way we speak of crisis, our blasé attitude, is, as far as I am concerned, no longer a viable position. The nature that is being choked to death nowadays is no longer the nature that we conceptualized from our culture-biased approach. It has become much more visceral, much more intimate.

Works Cited

Barkan, Ross. "Trump has savaged the environment. The planet cannot afford a second term." *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/17/donald-trump-environment-epa-climate-second-term. Accessed 30 Jan. 2020.

Barnosky, Anthony D. et al. "Approaching a state shift in Earth's biosphere." *Nature*, no. 486, 7 June 2012, pp. 52–58.

Biel, Robert. *The Entropy of Capitalism*, Brill, 2012.

Branner, Peter. "The Anthropocene is a Joke". *The Atlantic*, www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/08/arrogance-anthropocene/595795/. Accessed 25 Jan. 2020.

Deen, Thalif. "U.S. Lifestyle Is Not Up for Negotiation". Inter Press Service, www.ipsnews.net/2012/05/us-lifestyle-is-not-up-for negotiation. Accessed 2 Jan. 2020.

Denning, Michael. "'The Special American Conditions': Marxism and American Studies." *American Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1986, pp. 356–80.

"The Climate Issue." The Economist, www.economist.com/leaders/2019/09/19/the-climate-issue. Accessed 15 Jan. 2020.

Foster, John Bellamy. *Marx's Ecology. Materialism and Nature*, Monthly Review, 2000.

Fullbrook, Edward. "Economics 101: Dog barking, overgrazing and ecological collapse." *Real-world economics review*, no.87, 2019, pp.33–35, www.paecon.net/PAEReview/issue87/Fullbrook87.pdf. Accessed 15 Dec. 2019.

Gare, Arran E. *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*, Routledge, 1995.

Grgas, Stipe. "Tijelo u romanu Richarda Powersa Gain." *[sic]: a journal of literature, culture and literary translation*, www.sic-journal.org/ArticleView.aspx?aid=39, no. 1, 2010, doi: 10.15291/sic/1.1.lc.3.

Grgas, Stipe, and Svend Erik Larsen, editors. *The Construction of Nature*, Odense UP, 1994.

Hulme, Mike. "Geographical work at the boundaries of climate change." 2007. *Transactions of the Institute of the British Geographers*, Academia.edu/32422403/Geographical_work_at_the_boundaries_of_climate_change. Accessed 1 Feb. 2020.

---. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, Cambridge UP, 2009.

Koch, Max. "Elements of a political economy of the postgrowth era." *Real-world economics review*, issue no. 87, 19 March, 2019, pp. 90–105, http://www.paecon.net/PAEReview/issue87/Koch87.pdf. Accessed 30 Nov. 2019.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, Blackwell, 1991.

Levine, Robert S. "American Studies in an Age of Extinction." *States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies*, edited by Russ Castronovo and Susan Gillman, The U of North Carolina P, 2009, pp. 161–82.

Malm, Andreas. *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, Verso, 2016.

---. "It is time to try out an 'ecological Leninism'," www.versobooks.com/blogs/4450-it-is-time-to-try-out-an-ecological-leninism-interview-with-andreas-malm. Accessed 1 Dec. 2019.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: Volume I*. Translated by Ben Fowkes, Penguin Books, 1990.

Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Oxford UP, 1964.

---. "The Idea of Nature in America". *Daedalus*, 2008, http://amacad'org/publication/idea-nature-america. Accessed 17 Aug. 2019.

Miller, Perry. "Nature and the National Ego." 1956. *Errand Into the Wilderness*. The Belknap P, 1993, pp. 204–16.

Morgan, Jamie, and Edward Fullbrook. "Introduction: Economics and civilization in ecological crisis." *Real-world economics review*, issue no. 87, 19 March 2019, pp.2–8, www.paecon.net/PAEReview/issue87/MorganFullbrook87.pdf. Accessed 10 Oct. 2019.

Petrović, Gajo, and Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik. *Die gegenwärtige Bedeutung des Marxischen Denkens. Marx-Symposion 1983 in Dubrovnik*, Germinal Verlag, 1985.

Polanyi, Karl. *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press, 1954.

Postone, Moishe. "History and Helplessness: Mass mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism." *Public Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2006, archive.org/stream/HistoryHelplessnessMoishePostone/History%20%26%20Helplessness%20-%20Moishe%20Postone_djvu.txt. Accessed 10 Dec. 2019.

Powers, Richard. *Gain*, Vintage, 2001.

---. *Overstory*, W.W. Norton, 2018.

Rayner, Steve. "Foreword." *Why We Disagree About Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, by Mike Hulme, Cambridge UP, 2009, xxi–xxiv.

Rich, Nathaniel. *Odds Against Tomorrow*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013.

Rich, Nathaniel, and George Steinmetz. "Losing Earth," 2018, pulitzercenter.org/reporting/loosing-earth-decade-we-almost-stopped-climate-change Accessed 15 Jan. 2020.

Schneider-Mayerson, Mathew. "Necrocracy in America: American Studies Begins to Address Fossil Fuels and Climate Change." *American Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2015,

pp. 529–40.

Spash, Clive L., and Tone Smith. "Of ecosystems and economies: re-connecting economics with reality." *Real-world economics review*, issue no. 87, 19 March 2019, pp. 212–29, www.paecon.net/PAEReview/issue87/SpashSmith87.pdf. Accessed 15 Nov. 2019.

Stiegler, Bernard. *The Neganthropocene*, Open Humanities P, 2018.

Stoner, Alexander M., and Andony Melathopoulos. *Freedom in the Anthropocene: Twentieth-Century Helplessness in the Face of Climate Change*, Palgrave, 2015.

Swyngedouw, Erik. "Apocalpse forever? Post-political populism and the spectre of climate change." *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 27, 2010, pp. 213–32.

Wägenbaur, Thomas. "The Construction of Nature: A Critique of Ecological Reason." *The Construction of Nature*, edited by Stipe Grgas and Svend Erik Larsen, Odense UP, 1994, pp. 224–49.

Zalasiewicz, Jan, et al. "The Working Group on the Anthropocene: Summary of evidence and interim recommendations." *Anthropocene*, vol. 19, 2017, pp. 55–60, www.researchgate.net/publication/319613362_The_Working_Group_on_the_Anthropocene_Summary_of_evidence_and_interim_recommendations, doi: 10.1016/j.ancene.2017.09.001. Accessed 3 Feb. 2020.

Jelena Šesnić
University of Zagreb

Re-centering the History of the Americas: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

This article discusses the status of Toni Morrison as an American writer who consistently foregrounded African American history and experience and acted during her long career as a public intellectual. Morrison's writerly agenda has been to delve into the epistemological origin of constructions such as race and blackness, placed in the context of their historical manifestation, such as transatlantic slavery as manifested in Morrison's two most striking historical novels, *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008). Writing slavery, as a way to re-write the United States' history and probe its dark spaces, places Morrison's texts in a long line of nineteenth-century slave narratives, and in particular their twentieth-century avatar, the neo-slave novel, which strives to historicize slavery from the sufferer's perspective. In the process, Morrison creates a "resistant text" (Sommer) requiring the reader's imaginative and ethical engagement and refusing to fill in all the gaps. That the haunting of slavery still requires imaginative, historical, and ethical engagement, like the one accorded it by Morrison, is a fact of U.S. American social life to the present day.

Key words: the historical novel, the neo-slave novel, transatlantic slavery, Toni Morrison, memory, history

> [Toni Morrison's] work is rooted in history and pulls beauty from some of its most grotesque manifestations. But that beauty is not fantasy, and so it should not be surprising that she ranks among those who understand the hold that history has on us all.
>
> (Ta-Nehisi Coates xvii)

Margins and Centers

Toward the end of an interview for *Uncensored*, a documentary feature of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation produced in 1998, Toni Morrison allows herself to pronounce on the cumulative effect of her writing up to then: "I stood at the border, and claimed it as central, and made other people come over to it" (*Uncensored: Toni Morrison*). The cluster of spatial metaphors of borders, margins, and centers has been one of the organizing cognitive vehicles applied to disciplinary re-arrangements in critical and literary studies in recent times.[1] Still, refraining from the more theoretical underpinnings of this shift in the humanities, I would like to linger for the moment on the more specific implications of the metaphor. As I see it, Morrison's claim is more profound and encompassing than a trendy change of critical paradigms in literary studies. What Morrison is more concerned with is the sponsoring of literature, specifically her own and that of other writers of color, as a cognitive vehicle for its capacity to freely and unselfconsciously as perhaps never before explore the implications of being human (for characters nominally designated as marginal and de-centered).[2]

Hence she sees her writing to be largely indebted to the historical and historically conditioned status of marginality tagged onto the black people in the United States and professing both a simple and a profound claim—literature is a linguistic and aesthetic activity that primarily concerns itself with human experience as such—and from that perspective makes it secondary whether an experience, to be aesthetically meaningful and stirring, is "mar-

1 Ever since the early efforts at American literary canon expansion and reorganization, energized by a host of developments ranging from feminist to ethnic to postcolonial, hemispheric, and globalist perspectives, spatial metaphors have provided a cognitive frame for addressing the issues of knowledge production, legitimation, and dissemination. Even one of the latest attempts in this vein, Caroline Levander's intervention into the future of American literary studies and American literary history, finds itself drawn to a cluster of spatial metaphors in order to elucidate its key arguments.

2 For additional implications of the margin/center binary, see Tally (1–7).

ginal" or "mainstream," borderline or central, ultimately, black or white. So the notion of literature that Morrison evokes here engages her simultaneously on several levels, from the universal designation of "writer" to more particularized variants such as American, African American, and female writer. These levels interact even as Morrison then mischievously adds that she occasionally feels like a Russian author with respect to American literature—such is her sense of divergence or displacement from the national mainstream (*Uncensored: Toni Morrison*). The trajectory that she thus outlines for her works, as I further read into her responses to the questions posed in the interview, is to allow, after the first transition has presumably been made—that from the center to the margin—the next shift to take place. This latter shift aims to render, first experientially and aesthetically but then also ontologically, meaningless the division into a central and a marginal kind of experience, especially when and if it attaches to the idea of "race" or "color." That this is a fairly recent achievement is remarked by Linda Wagner Martin, who contends that, even as late as the mid-nineteen-eighties, U.S. readers "had only just begun to accept African American characters as complex individuals—especially African American women characters" (69).

Morrison destabilizes the reader's sense of the fixity of cognitive categories, accruing the concepts of race, color, color line, blackness, and whiteness, while undermining their respective hierarchy and status in a received epistemology of race. This requires no less than re-examining the very foundations of modernity, as David Theo Goldberg argues: "[R]ace has been a constitutive feature of modernity, ordering conceptions of self and other, of sociopolitical membership and exclusion" (148). Put differently, if a so-called marginal experience gets embedded in a set of culturally heavyweight representations (such as the historical genre in the case I will be arguing here), this renders problematic the entire categorial system commanding the meaning of individual elements within it. This wavering between specificities while using them to tackle the universal, which ultimately dismantles yet another assumption, of what constitutes universality as opposed to particularity,

is the way Morrison uses the seemingly insignificant and off-center to delve into persistent, complex, and enduring problems of being human, and acting human in history. She proposes quite defiantly and with assurance born of her writing that this dilemma for her centers on female, black, and socially marginal characters in a devolving history of the Americas, of the mistitled New World giving rise to the "elegiac vision of the pastoral" (Sandy 35). Mark Sandy finds in the types of characters that Morrison takes as conduit for telling her stories precisely marginal men and women, harboring grief and loss, the kind of common figures used by William Wordsworth, both writers thus introducing "anti-pastoral elements" (35) as a reaction to the implacable historical and social forces constraining their characters.

The prerogatives of historical perspective and its fictional form are indicated in the view of the genre offered by Georg Lukács. The historical novel is meant to combine different types of individuals, the "world-historical" and ordinary, insignificant, according to Lukács (231–32). The point is to individualize and personalize overwhelming social and collective events, and to refract them through an individual's experience, perspective, and psychology. It is thus "the historical novel's 'middle-of-the-road' hero" (232) that should reflect the spirit of the age. The (historical) novel is also under a special obligation to manage the tension between the public and the private, since "by representing a limited section of reality . . . it [the novel] aims to evoke the totality of the process of social development" (237). The point is thus to render an idea of history that will be different and distinct from historiography, the epic, and the historical drama, and yet distill the significance of the past. A further point for Morrison is to render a story generated by a specific ilk of characters and make it count as history, thus meaningful for the entire nation.

This intervention, the inherent possibility of the historical novel to cultivate a different breed of characters, is seconded by Philip Fisher's discussion of the specific cultural work, a contribution that the historical novel is

meant to proffer to the national culture.[3] In that respect, arguably, the historical novel's successor and contender in both twentieth-century African American and national culture is the neo-slave novel, a designation pertinent both to *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008), the two novels dealt with in this argument. Hence, it is the neo-slave novel and its historiographic inclination that proposes to do the comprehensive cultural work of processing slavery in the ambit of the national cultural imaginary.[4]

Perhaps still one of the most poignant images of the imbrications of the so-called universal and the so-called particular, of the presumably grand and small narratives, is encapsulated in the string of episodes in *Beloved* that Sethe's, the female protagonist's reported speech and interior monologues sporadically reconstruct for us. This particular instance refers to Sethe's obsessive remembering of the ink which she processed from indigo to be used by the owner of the Kentucky slave plantation, Sweet Home, where she lives together with a band of male slaves. Sethe is plagued by the memory since she belatedly understands the full implication of the use to which Schoolteacher, a sadistic master, puts the ink: not incidentally, the ideology of racism noted

3 See especially Fisher's Introduction and Chapter 1, explicitly dedicated to the historical novel in early nineteenth-century American literature.

4 For a general framework, see Eyerman 2001; McDowell and Rampersad 1989. For more particular readings of *Beloved* in the above-mentioned frame, see Rody, esp. 3–16, 19–104; Rushdy, "Daughters"; Rushdy, *Neo-Slave*, esp. ch. 2. Respective plot summaries indicate the historical impulse behind both novels: *Beloved* covers the period from the 1850s to 1873, thus from slavery to Reconstruction, following the story of Sethe, a fugitive slave who, pressed by the posse of her pursuers, slays one of her children and spends the rest of the novel expiating for her deed. Additionally, Sethe's character is based on the historical figure of Margaret Garner (Henderson 82). Morrison masterfully complicates the relationship between the story and the plot. *A Mercy* wavers between the past and present in the voices and perspectives of different characters but mostly covers the period of the late 17th century in the mid-Atlantic colonies and the irreversible setting in of slavery and slave codes. The focus is on Florens, a slave girl presumably given up by her mother, a fact that is taken up only in the novel's final chapter. As identified by scholars, the historical kernel here is Bacon's Rebellion (Montgomery 2; Wagner Martin 156). Here, again, it is as much about story as about narration.

in ciphers underlies the transformation of the deceptively idyllic plantation into a hellhole soon after his arrival and takeover, and underlies his educational and instructional efforts both on his pupils and on the slaves.[5] Ink, writing, and knowledge-production are linked in one of the most striking metaphors in the novel attesting to the historical rise of plantation slavery in the Americas.

As Morrison claims in the above-mentioned interview, racism is propped by science and ingrained in the education that we receive; it is thus written in ink by which a culture purports to enlighten, cultivate, and inform. The ink, with its dark tinge, however, works as an interesting double to another, white fluid, Sethe's mother's milk, which serves as a counterpoint to the literally and symbolically dehumanizing effects of the ink. Morrison does not simplify or corral the manifold implications of the images: the ink is, especially in comparison to the whiteness of the milk, apparently black, dark; it is produced by Sethe but, as are other products of slave labor, immediately alienated from its producer, who has no control whatsoever over its use or effect, so that it is fairly impossible for Sethe to evade the devastating consequences of being put down in black ink. On the other hand, the whiteness of the milk allegedly accrues to Sethe simply and incontrovertibly as an extension of her biological, reproductive labor, which by definition could not be taken over, expropriated from her as a mother, or denied her child. This logic, however, is patently untrue under slavery. The whiteness of the milk might guarantee the child's survival but is, due also to the symbolism of its color, open to manipulation and appropriation by the whites (16, 190). Its very whiteness renders it symbolically noxious and potentially devastating for Sethe and her child, Beloved. Blackness and whiteness, the creative and the destructive, the social and the personal intermingle on the level of key images in the novel.

---

5 Morrison, *Beloved* 35, 183–84, 257. All subsequent references to the novel will be cited parenthetically in the text.

For Florens, one of the protagonists and intradiegetic narrators in *A Mercy*, it is shoes, or rather her craving for them, that signal her incipient femininity, her differentiation from her mother, and her state of bondage. Shoes draw her out as an available sexual object for her masters, and thus dramatize the point where she severs her ties with childhood and her mother's nurturing care. Shoes become an object of aesthetic import, a correlative of the character's emotional and cognitive state, but also an item functioning in a specific emotional and corporeal economy of slavery: Florens's dainty feet protected by shoes might become precisely her most precious and thus most damnable commodity. To save her from that doom, her mother induces a somewhat friendly disposed trader, Jacob Vaark, to take Florens away in lieu of the debt owed to him by her predatory owner, D'Ortega. The economy of a particularized literary motif is what Morrison uses to tackle grand issues. Philip Page thus observes "Morrison's lyrical repetition or near-repetition of phrases and images," which he considers within a larger ambit of "circularity" (142).

Redrawing the Literary Field

To continue with the key metaphor from the beginning, a similar tension between the margin and the center is at work also in Morrison's non-fictional writings. Cheryl Wall conveniently recapitulates Morrison's indubitable stature as a pre-eminent writer and critic (139–48). As a literary critic, Morrison has become a trailblazer, in particular with her study of the entanglement of literary whiteness and Africanism in classic works of American literature that apparently do not concern themselves with the notion of race, or if so, do it only marginally (*Playing*). On the contrary, she has contributed to the idea of whiteness as contingent on the expression of blackness as its underside—moral, ethical, philosophical, or material. Moreover, she has insisted that such an intermingling constitutes an abiding strain in American literature thus reflecting the nation's obsession with the issue of race, whatever the period, genre, or author. This intervention is important not only as a substantive and convincing comment on American literature and the logic

of its historical development but also as a strategic move on Morrison's part that should enable her and other designated authors some respite from the implied task of handling presumably secondary and marginal issues. In an interview with Cecil Brown, Morrison contends that, until recently, African American writing has been seen to serve specific extraliterary goals, while often being evaluated for the presence or absence of externally imposed criteria. Some of these were, routinely, the literature's protest tone, social consciousness, and malleability to some socially generated expectations placed on the black characters (Brown and Morrison 455). Consequently, if the entire American canon is shown to be invested in either exorcising or incorporating the idea of color, then the African American artist is simply on the forefront of what everybody else is doing.

As part of her perspicuous and comprehensive redrawing of the critical and fictional field within which her text and similar ones unfold, Morrison bridged the gap that she initially perceived between the burgeoning production of black female texts in the late 1960s and the 1970s and the non-existent critical reflection on that production at the time (Stepto and Morrison 485). As part of her critical perspective, it is important to restate one of the lasting claims that Morrison makes about racism as a particular form of "racial ideology," labeling it a constitutive part of the project of conquest and appropriation of the New World (Berlin 9). A particular racial thinking, crystallized as racism, is necessarily a condition for the history of the New World to start unfolding and the engine behind a huge political-economic project that spawned the Americas. In his comprehensive study of the first two centuries of North American slavery, Ira Berlin unfolds the particulars of the way race, in tandem with class, becomes a salient point in determining and maintaining the institution of slavery. Such codification of color is one of the indications of the transition from "societies with slaves" to "slave societies" (Berlin 9, 17–92), a process appropriately recorded in *A Mercy*.

In addition, let me proceed to outline a more specific argument

claiming that the novels central to my discussion of Morrison's work, namely, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, are to be considered as historical novels, among other applicable generic categories. In the second instance, these are the novels of New World slavery that preeminently occupy in the national imagination a space of a still inchoate commemoration and memorialization of slavery. At the spot where the representation of the past and the historicization of slavery intersect, as pointed out by Rushdy and Rody, among others, is the birthplace of the neo-slave novel, a post-Civil Rights genre that derives from the ingrained tradition of slave narratives as the first major literary expression of African American sensibility (McDowell and Rampersad vii–xiii).

It is noted in literary historiography that African American writing has only fairly recently engaged more deliberately with the theme of slavery, in whichever genre or form. A reason for this deferral is conjectured by Ron Eyerman's study of the phases of incorporating slavery into the African American and American cultural spheres. He considers slavery as "cultural trauma" for generations of African Americans that consequently demands to be represented and modulated in the process (Eyerman 23–57). With Morrison and other like-minded writers, it finally becomes possible to consider the historical novel of slavery as partaking of the mainstream cultural climate, or at least finding itself in a position to do so. Hazel Carby articulates this concern: "[W]hat interests me the most about these historical novels is the choice of slavery as a period in which to set historical fiction and how that choice itself is generated from particular cultural conditions" (128). Carby proceeds to analyze one of the first examples of the genre of the neo-slave novel, Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, conceding the novel's importance: "Walker's representation of slavery is her philosophy of history, which is to be understood as the necessary prehistory of contemporary society" (Carby 136). The similar could be argued about Morrison.

Let me further reinforce the argument of the cultural and political import of the neo-slave novel – precisely as a mode of remembering and

memorializing – by drawing on a fairly recent debate in the United States pertaining to the construction of a national museum of slavery. Interestingly, there are museums of slavery, but they are located elsewhere, not in the United States but, rather, in Liverpool, England, itself an important post in the international slave trade through the centuries. Conversely, it has been noted that there are a number of museums and memorials of the Holocaust in the States. The comparison is not meant to conflate the two events, and even less so to deny the need for their appropriate institutional marking, but to point to a strange contradiction of American history—an event, such as the Holocaust, that strictly speaking does not belong to national history, finds its place in the national imaginary in quite engaging terms and on a respectable scale. However, slavery, which has indubitably shaped not only the country's past but also inflects its present, is not seen fit to be commemorated by a single institution of national stature. According to some critics, the extant local, regional or period-based museums of African American history in the States should fill the void, but this clearly does not amount to the same thing. Such a telling gap in the national process of remembering, as described by Eyerman, is what Morrison has in mind as she deplores the nation's refusal to remember or its adherence to selective memory.[6] She acknowledges that, except for the elusive testimony of slave narratives, she lacked precedent for the kind of story she pursued in *Beloved* (Morrison, "A Bench" 4, 40–41; *Playing* 50–51). Thus the intent behind *Beloved* was to show how history is tangential to mem-

6 Consider the foiled project for the founding of the national museum of slavery and the role that it should have played in the reorganization of national memory ("The United States National Slavery Museum"). In the meantime, in 2016 President Obama dedicated the National Museum of African American History and Culture at the navel of national historical memory on the Washington Mall, which figures as a pre-eminent *lieu de mémoire,* in Pierre Nora's words. However, to sharpen our perspective, consider how the museum's aim is to incorporate the history of slavery within a larger narrative, in contrast to one of the most recent attempts enacted at the Whitney Plantation Slavery Museum (a private initiative), whose mission is to offer an unflinching portrayal of slavery: "While other museums may include slavery in their exhibits, the Whitney Plantation is the first of its kind to focus primarily on the institution" (Rosenfeld).

ory and how such an interdependence is crucial when it comes to converting slavery from memory to history, from the personal to the collective, from the particular to the emblematic (Fabre and O'Meally).

The politicized moment of the recognition of *Beloved* is already part of Morrison lore, a well-rehearsed episode in late-twentieth century American literary history in which a number of black authors, scholars, and intellectuals expressed their concern with the tendency of the mainstream culture to bypass parts of the less palatable historical record, which thus gets silenced and marginalized ("Black Writers in Praise of Toni Morrison"; Mitgang). One could argue that the appearance two decades later of *A Mercy*, also crucially concerned with slavery, happened as a politicized moment too, albeit with a different slant, coinciding with the historical election of Barack Obama as the first black president (Nicol and Terry 7; Tedder 144–45). Similarly, we could argue that the current re-reading of these two novels partakes in the present upheaval caused properly speaking by the historical haunting of race in America. Looking at the country today (2020), Morrison's use of ghostly figures as ciphers of the unaccounted-for burden of history, seems prescient, as we witness the resurgence of racial feelings supposedly laid at rest. As suggested by Keith Byerman, Morrison remains "the writer most thoroughly engaged in the quest for a fully historicized Afro-American narrative discourse," especially since "[a]ll her novels demonstrate the impact of the personal and communal past on the present and show how social, economic, and cultural realities of a particular time and place shape the identities of her characters," casting them in the process as representative national subjects (814).

That there should be such a connection is argued by Doris Sommer, who works with the generic mold of historical writing in the context of what she designates as "minority writing in the Americas" (*Proceed*). In an earlier study, Sommer insists that creolized cultural forms in the Americas have produced an alternative historical fiction pertinent to new national identities arising in the zones seen marginal to Europe. She builds upon Benedict

Anderson's depiction of the forms of print capitalism used by the carriers of creole nationalism in the New World nations (*Foundational* 1–29). The minority writing across the board that Sommer analyzes in her study consciously appropriates forms of historical imagination for a new phase of imagining the nations in the Western hemisphere. *Beloved*, a specific focus of Sommer's reading in her second book, testifies to the change of focus, just as is later the case with *A Mercy* (*Proceed* 160–84). The neo-slave novel has become a form that crystallizes social and historical realities of long duration, providing ways in which some events may be epistemologically transposed from the past into history (either as discipline or as literature).

Morrison will not allow us to disregard the implications of imperialism and racism for the course of New World and global history, and for their ties to the present. In her novels she, thus, figuratively delineates what in another context Michael Omi and Howard Winant have termed the formation of race on the macro-social level. As the Europeans meet their others, Omi and Winant explain, a comprehensive and far-reaching project of racialization gets under way. The category of religion, obviously a relic from pre-Renaissance times, fails to register the differences, so other descriptors must be used, among them primarily the epidermis (Omi and Winant 61–64). In fact, one of the arguments of placing globalization in the early modern period claims that its rise is contingent on and implicated in the conquest, despoiling, and continuous extraction of resources from the Americas and other marginal zones from the Western perspective (Blaut). In his reading of geography in Toni Morrison's novels, Beavers queries the intersection of space, place-making, and agency to argue for specific political imaginaries of slavery that Morrison intends (1–22). We should therefore consent to a reviewer's pronouncement that both *Beloved* and *A Mercy* tackle the nation's, America's "original sin" (Gates).

In *A Mercy*, we see the social category of race arising virtually before our eyes in the testimony rendered by Florens's mother, the first one of the

family to be brought from Africa. The process of her (sexual) breaking in—her sexual trauma—is at the same time the moment where her racial identity ("negrita") is announced and established.[7] From there it still does not unequivocally proceed that race clinches the slave status, or that the two are inextricably linked. However, this process has been prepared, Laura Doyle suggests as she considers the narrative of the racialization of freedom and nationality in the trans-Atlantic world (*Freedom's*). Specifically, the notions of freedom, civic status, and agency are linked to the Anglo-Saxons, while the other groups exhibit these features only marginally, if at all (Mudgett 68; Cox 107).

Even though by plot indicators *A Mercy* predates *Beloved* (in terms of narrated time, the prehistory of slavery in *A Mercy*, and its aftermath in *Beloved*), there are ways in which it in fact replicates some of the lessons Morrison learned as a writer and imparted to her readers in *Beloved*. In the first place, *A Mercy* is reminiscent, in narrative structure and the process of narrative transmission, of *Beloved*, as becomes obvious considering the types of narrators, focalization, fragmentation of the plot, temporal layers, polyphony, etc. Secondly, *A Mercy* comes in tow of *Beloved*'s uncompromising gaze into the gut of slavery—and it is a lot sketchier in that respect. Still, "*A Mercy* asks readers to consider what exactly initiates the racial ideology of American history" (Cox 107), while then depicting its bitter fruit in the plotlines of *Beloved*. However, a telling departure is observable in significantly reducing the role of the supernatural in the texture and the plot of *A Mercy* in comparison to *Beloved*. Even so, Morrison imaginatively joins the two texts by using the voice or assuming the perspective of the dead (narrators).

In *A Mercy*, the narrator is concerned with a semblance of historical accuracy. At the very beginning, we are provided with a contemporary map

7 Morrison, *A Mercy: A Novel* 165. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

of the mid-section of the North American Atlantic coast, the Chesapeake region, crisscrossed by the names of native tribes, showing the derivation of most geographical features on the map from aboriginal languages. As Beavers contends, in this early colonial period everything is still "inchoate" and "fluid," from racial codes, social relations, states, and maps (164–65, 169). (The novel does not encompass only parts of British America but also those of its contenders, thus evoking, explicitly, the Portuguese, i. e. Catholic, and the Dutch claims. Furthermore, a specific geographic distribution coupled with the regional political economy of the slowly but steadily consolidating institution of slavery is in evidence in the scattered references to Brazil and the Caribbean, where it paves the way for what Patterson lists as "the large-scale slave systems" in an Appendix to his 1982 study.) This indicates that, in the historical content presented in *A Mercy*, Morrison goes one step further, or rather, back in history—she clearly evokes and intends the primary, Indian, layer that was overlaid by subsequent interventions. The novel thus implicitly and explicitly engages an additional element of America's "original sin," not only slavery but also the genocidal treatment of the native population. Going back to the seventeenth century enables Morrison to do as much and to insist on a very specific link between two historical processes—the gradual introduction of slavery in North America and the attendant pursuit of the dispossession, displacement, and destruction of the native inhabitants (Babb 150). The intertwining of two formative narratives should be recognized also in the array of characters including the whites, the blacks, and the natives engaged in similar pursuits but in different roles, some as masters, others as servants or slaves.

As historians of slavery point out, the seventeenth century is crucial in that it was the period in which slavery gradually took hold of the continent and insinuated itself into civil, legal, and economic practices (Berlin 15–92). As the novel makes clear, it is still being experimented with and is not firmly, irrevocably tied to the notion of color or latched onto the (black) race. In other words, the novel fictionalizes the fall into slavery, the point where a so-

ciety that could go either way chose, or was driven, to a specific form whose full-blown consequences are then dwelt upon in *Beloved*. In *A Mercy*, social, economic, and racial categories are still in flux. Willard and Scully, white indentured servants, begrudge a black blacksmith his free status; their initial solidarity with him crumbles away under the pressures both of race and social status. Arguably, and perhaps rightly so, given the turmoil of the European Great War, religious identities are of greater import than the color line, as observed in the interaction between the Catholics and the Protestants, different Protestant denominations, and heathens and Christians. Again, the imperial center radiates its divisions and attempts to impose and replicate them at the colonial periphery. Slowly, however, the issues of religion will become subsidiary to the issue of socio-economic taxonomy based on color. (In fact, it would be possible to argue that, given the fast rate and high accidence of intermingling, voluntary or coerced, between, provisionally speaking, blacks and whites in some regions of North America, the increased attention to color was necessary precisely to keep in check the process of eliding the racial difference, possibly leading to what Berlin throughout his book describes as a "creole society.") In other words, we see the beginning of a specific process of nation-building in North America that will eventuate in the formation of a new republic: the construction of a national subject becomes invested primarily in the notion of race as the factor of whiteness becomes the badge of a free civic (and economic) agent.[8]

In both *A Mercy* and *Beloved* the transatlantic perspective is maintained as an important vantage point. In the former, Africa figures as a colony, a source of labor force, a site included in a triangular slave trade, thus a source of fabulous, unprecedented accumulation of wealth. D'Ortega is a greedy and lecherous Catholic slave trader who owes his economic rise to the trade in flesh, as Jacob Vaark muses. The Protestant Vaark at first refuses to deal di-

8 Dana Nelson's and Russ Castronovo's studies illustrate the key juncture of (implicit, now excavated) whiteness and nation-building.

rectly in people but as a creditor still participates both in the slave trader's profit and losses, and eventually decides to ride the crest of the sugar boom in the Caribbean. While Maryland thrives on an alliance of tobacco and slavery, down south, sugar is the "kill-devil" (*A Mercy* 31), as vast sugar cane plantations swallow droves of slaves. The logic of greed and profit-making makes clear that the initial accumulation of capital, necessary to sustain economic activity in a new region (periphery) being incorporated into the economic system, needs slavery as its *modus operandi*. In light of this, the entanglement between the capitalist economy and the brazen and relentless exploitation of the work force in slavery should be understood not as an anomaly but, in fact, as a precondition for the boundless wealth and economic strength of the European powers and of a nation-to-be (Curtin 51–52). Slavery, and tangentially, other forms of stratification (religious, gender, social) underwrite the civilizing project in the New World.

Despite a cultural geography installed by the triangulated slave trade, colonization, and imperialism inevitably creating a creolizing culture, Africa is the only unadulterated place of origin claimed by the slave mothers in the novels and imparted to their progeny, usually daughters, as this formative but traumatized genealogy is examined by Rody (3–16). In *A Mercy*, concluding words are granted to the mother, who in *Beloved* is silenced through absence and death. Florens's mother wraps up the story by taking us to the beginning, to Africa, and recounting her passage from Africa to Barbados to North America. In such capacity, Africa is treated at greater length in *Beloved*, where the image is pursued more elaborately and consistently in Sethe's lineage—her mother was an African who survived the Middle Passage, embraced a fellow black man, and was able to impart a few words of her native tongue to her infant daughter, so that the grown-up Sethe remembers some of them (29–30, 57–59). Africa as a phantasmagoric place is rendered in *Beloved*'s sections in the novel but is covered over by the traumatic passage, the impossibility of survival, and the subsequent deracination and depersonalization attending slaves at their destination (200–203). Even though supernatural elements are

less prominent in *A Mercy*, they still prevail when it comes to the memory of slavery processed by one of the most mysterious characters, Sorrow. As a mongrelized child, born out of the sea and of unknown origin, she retains scraps of memories, entangled with dreams and nightmares, that testify to some previous traumas but also evoke a lasting myth—that of the Africans walking across the water back to the motherland. Sorrow, just like Beloved, may be said to contain some shreds of collective memory of the pre-slavery period.

Gendering the History of the New World

Critics have noted Morrison's preoccupation with African American families as heavily matriarchal and female-centered.[9] Morrison herself admits as much in her interviews while she explains that such was the bent of her and other female writers' imagination responding to specific urgencies (Morrison, "A Bench" 38; Brown and Morrison 455–56; McKay and Morrison 421–22). Since for her it has been impossible to divorce the political and social from the ostensibly purely aesthetic, she maintains that the black woman's story had to be told at some point (Morrison, "Rootedness" 339–45). She has often had to respond to claims of herself marginalizing and excising black men from her fictional families, and consequently according undue attention to black women as mothers and matriarchs. Following the black family's record of engagement with slavery, emancipation, and post-emancipation in U.S. history, Morrison imagines variations, more compulsory than self-willed, which have made the African American family what it is, regardless of what a social sciences perspective would require it to be.[10]

---

9 For competent overviews of this well-known debate in African American criticism, see McDowell 75–97; Dubey, *Black* .

10 In this respect, most of her female-based households are in a sense her imaginative response to and refutation of the impact and reverberations of the controversial Moynihan report commissioned in 1965 by the U.S. Department of Labor (Moynihan). See Brown and Morrison 457; Dubey 1994: 14–32.

The dynamics of history is relayed through an interesting positioning of female characters. Already in the third chapter, early on in the plot of *A Mercy*, Jacob Vaark, the patriarch, albeit benevolent and more progressive than most of his peers, is dead of pox. Thus, the running of the farm in the wilderness is left to a bevy of women including his wife Rebekka; Lina, a competent Native American who helped them set up the food production and farm management; Florence, a slave-girl whom Lina adopts; and finally, the moody and unpredictable orphan, Sorrow. The four women and soon-to-be-born Sorrow's baby do not make a likely winning combination on the frontier: "Female, illegal . . . subject to purchase, hire, assault, abduction, exile," Lina muses (58). They make up a makeshift family, being existentially speaking all orphans, each marked by an individual loss symbolizing the shorthand of history (59). Another makeshift family in the novel is the bond between Willard and Scully, who against many odds set up an all-male household.

Yet another provisional family structure is temporarily created during Rebekka's crossing over from England to America, from girlhood to womanhood, from poverty and religious bigotry to relative comfort and freedom from religious restrictions. The beginning of her journey is not particularly auspicious; in fact, we could say that it constitutes her own kind of middle passage, being sold, in the manner of slaves, by her father to her future husband (74). Still, in comparison to stinky, filthy, crime- and blood-ridden England, America is more embracing of her as a woman, at first (78). During her passage, she bonds with a group of women who enact their own vision of self-invention in the New World.

On her deathbed, Rebekka evokes the idea of bonding and of the possibility extended also to women in the new country. This sense of empowerment continues on the farm reinforced by her initially tenuous but then firm connection with Lina. However, the ongoing tension bears also on the provisional communities—the characters, instead of sustaining long-term bonds, in the end succumb to betrayal of each other and to isolation. Rebek-

ka lapses into the same kind of religious bigotry that pushed her away from Europe as she in the end dismisses her household help as "savages" (159). Willard and Scully fear the coming of a new master, who might continue to exploit their indentured status. Florens becomes intractable in her infatuation, enslavement to her passion for the blacksmith. Even on a small scale, a farm approximating a civilized state, the array of different characters can barely hold together and move beyond their differences, despite their little mercies (155–56).

While in her previous novels Morrison, in her own words, does not really care about either white characters or the white audience's gaze, and pointedly tries to escape them catering to her black audience, both in *Beloved* and more insistently in *A Mercy*, she moves towards an interracial feminine solidarity based on "cross-cultural encounters with women . . . of other racial or ethnic groups" (Rody 12; Brown and Morrison 457; Morrison "Rootedness" 339–45). *Beloved* dramatizes this vantage point in an especially poignant revisiting of the episode of Denver's birth. The latter's name in fact commemorates her midwife, a white trash girl, Amy Denver, herself an escaped servant on the way to the North and freedom (30–33, 71–79). In *A Mercy*, Florens finds herself in a similar position. On her way to deliver her mistress's message to the blacksmith, she comes across a Puritan village and, black and foreign, is incriminated as a witch. We have seen in previous passages how this episode may be seen as constitutive of a transcendental rationale for the meaning of race. Yet in the context of my present concerns, this episode should also be seen as a temporary suspension of the divisive logic of race coupled with patriarchy since it transpires that Florens is saved by a white girl, a self-professed witch. Female witchery is an early and here the only alternative to the joint exigencies of religious, patriarchal, and racist systems. The act of mercy is also almost accidental and fleeting, just like the other acts of female bonding in the novel.

Even though it has been suggested at the beginning of this section

that Morrison depicts strong female characters and all-female households, this is not to suggest that she adulates them. Quite on the contrary, *A Mercy* shows unsuccessful communication between the mother and the daughter. The entire book, its process of story-telling, is a testament to the mother's failure to nurture (due to slavery) and to the daughter's pain of loss (of the mother and the mother's love). The mother's voice, in her final address simultaneously the ultimate chapter of the narrative, pleads her case with the daughter, trying to explain what it was that made her give up her female child—and apparently hang on to her younger male child. But there is no way to ensure that Florens, the daughter, will hear the mother's words, since they fall outside her purview—her "sadness" in the end is a sign of failure (161). Besides, her story is deflected from the mother, even from her surrogate mother, Lina, and directed to her lover, the blacksmith and healer, who in the end forgoes her for another male child, his adoptive son. Florens once again becomes an orphan. As in *Beloved*, Morrison yet again questions the universal, the meaning of love, through a particular query—the implications of motherhood in slavery. Thus, the bond between the mothers and daughters is rendered ambiguous.

Baby Suggs from *Beloved*, a matriarch, preacher, and spiritual leader of the newly emancipated black community in Ohio, professes a specific theology of the flesh. She repeatedly exhorts her congregation, assembled almost *ad hoc* in a clearing in the woods, while she occupies a stone altar in the middle, to tend to their bodies and body parts that were desecrated, reviled, and soiled in slavery (80–83). She urges the people to love their respective body parts in an attempt to counteract in the process of self-appreciation the devastating effects of spiritual death in slavery.[11] While the immediate and

11 This is discussed in particular by sociologist Patterson (*Slavery*) and historian Nell Irvin Painter (*Southern*). Painter uses the term "soul murder" to account for the devastating psychological effects of enslavement on slaves. Saidiya Hartman's 1997 study also takes cognizance of the psychological toll of the manifold forms of enslavement as a constant daily regime of control, surveillance, and subjection.

long-term healing import of such an exercise is not to be underestimated, in this section I would like to dwell more specifically on some other aspects of corporeality, bodily exigencies, the fleshly theology, and ultimately an epistemology based and stamped on the body, especially the black female body.

Initially, the wresting of an alternative history from the clutches of the sanctioned version takes place through the long-held opposition between the oral and the written.[12] In addition, Fabre and O'Meally consider the practices of memorializing in African American history while proposing that African American cultural forms, from high to popular, are invested in an ongoing tension between history (pertaining to the written) and forms of memory (pertaining to orality) ("Introduction" 3–17). Such a continuous swerving back and forth contributes also to the project proposed by *Beloved*. Broadly speaking, the novel engages in forms of memory and its eventual and wayward crystallization into history. Before the arrival of Paul D to Sethe's house, she does her best to evade memories or to block them more or less effectively: "To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (40). Residual elements are possibly retained in the idea of haunting, and the disruptive presence of a ghost in the house, but this could at first be put down to family mystery, as is the wont of the gothic mode. Paul D not only unwittingly unclogs Sethe's memory lanes, but the encounter also causes his memory tin-box to open and pour its contents out (39).[13]

Thus, the first move is made, that of enabling remembering to occur, so that slavery may be committed to memory. At the same time, as is made clear with the disappearance of the "haint," the process of remembering entails mastery, a certain normalization of an extraordinary experience. This is what the materialization of the ghost testifies to: Sethe, Paul D, and Denver

12 For the orality/literacy binary in African American culture, see Morrison, "Rootedness"; McKay and Morrison, 421, 427; Dubey, *Signs*.

13 For the materiality of memory practices, see Yates 1–49.

will not be allowed to settle into routine family ways as Beloved, the essence of slavery, materializes in flesh. At the same time, the exigencies she makes on all the characters exercise to the limit their memory and their cognitive and emotional capacities joined in the same goal: to remember slavery not simply as a domesticated part of one's personal narrative, an uplifting family tale, or a morale-boosting communal narrative, but as something in excess of all of these (172). This is why Paul D almost suffocates after he has copulated with Beloved: "And afterward, beached and gobbling air, in the midst of repulsion and personal shame, he was thankful for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to" (250). This is why Sethe initially gleefully humors Beloved's repeated entreaties to tell stories (about herself and Beloved), only subsequently to be literally wasted and emaciated by Beloved's voraciousness for the past (237). This is why Denver has to break out of the circle and swap her immersion into the past for more immediate concerns.

Similarly, as Sethe and Denver are the first to realize Beloved's mixed potential, a similar recognition must take place on a larger scale for the process of memory to take its full course resulting in a communal consensus. Hence, community ought to identify Beloved and her multifarious capacity. When her presence exceeds the bounds of the enclosed domestic space of Baby Suggs's house, it is then that the implications of her role become public. The effect of her desire to know and press the characters into recalling and retelling slavery, and a fully disastrous effect of such a demand, must be reckoned with collectively. In the fluctuating definition of Beloved's complex role and in an attempt to define her, we see emerging a historical (and thus collective), shared, and cognitively validated experience.

The oral and orality stand represented in *Beloved* as sites of eruption of the folk, black people's life-forms (245). First, there are Beloved's repeated urgings of other characters to tell her stories, in order to feed her memory or to restore it. The next is the narrative's reliance on the dynamics, structure, and tempo of (oral) storytelling—some stories are imparted in the way

they materialize for the characters in question (Denver's birth; the story of the flight from Sweet Plantation—as we patch it together from Paul D's and Sethe's jumbled recollections; part of Sethe's childhood; Sethe's secret); the fact that some of the stories are repetitive suggests that the novel is not interested so much in the event as such but more so in the form it takes for the event to turn into a story and to become narrativized, thus also part of the character's individual life-story, and to make sense for the characters and the reader. In that sense, as Sommer contends, *Beloved* is an experiment in story-telling and the circulation of stories (*Beloved* 151–57; Sommer, *Proceed* 160–84).

Other elements of the seeming privileging of orality over print and print literacy abound in the novel. We are reminded again of the fiendish, almost allegorical implications given to the ink and Schoolteacher's educational efforts. Next, we ought to consider the devastating effect of the newspaper item that shatters Paul D's complacent belief in the price of Sethe's escape from Sweet Home. As Stamp Paid realizes that Paul D is unaware of Sethe's story (the family is isolated from the rest of the community, and the story does not circulate), he decides to show Paul D the article depicting the murder and attempted murder of her children committed by Sethe. Paul D winces from the print, rightly guessing that only an outrage would put a black woman into the papers, as in the next instant, Sethe's story unfolds before him in the form of a folded piece of newspaper (147–48). Paul D is also the one who, towards the end of the novel, voices once again his skepticism of the role of letters in black people's emancipation, but his doubt is precisely what sets him apart from Denver's confidence and desire to learn her letters and eventually go to college. As Paul D sees it, Halle, Denver's father, who got stuck on the Kentucky plantation and lost his mind there, had no use for letters and numbers, while for him letters only meant the transfer of ownership on the deeds of sale, so that the print only signified the extension of the white man's power over blacks (252).

Another instance that corroborates the incipient connection between orality and African American culture is the element of performativity that also repudiates the fixity and stability of a written record and instead engages the context and the participants in a performance. For Morrison, the energy of performance and non-fixed genres infuses her writing in an attempt to approximate the black expressive forms (McKay and Morrison 426–27). Granted, both orality and performativity are central to the notion of African American culture in the Americas, but the drift of my argument in this section requires that they be associated with and explicitly attributed to black women, as agents, participants, subjects, and sufferers in historical configurations of the New World. We have seen the mother's line necessarily more pronounced in the imbalance created by the reproductive law of slavery—the children follow the condition of the mother. In addition, only the mother is certain, or as suggested by Hortense Spillers, "mama's baby, papa's maybe" illustrates the perversion of the family principle in slavery (64–81). Sethe's children are fathered by a black slave, who is left behind to languish in Kentucky, while she plunges on towards freedom.

The attendant ambiguity of the notion of gendering as a viable vehicle of historical imagination is thus echoed in criticism, and for reasons that exceed that of real, concrete impediments posed by slavery. Madhu Dubey has recently expressed some reservations about conveniently collapsing the idea of black culture with the notions of orality and performance, at the expense of situating the black cultural formations in the context of changes wrought by postmodernity (*Signs* 1–16). Similarly, Ying seems to agree that to manage "a written form" would empower the African American culture, which is mostly oral and aural (45).

Thus, in *A Mercy*, Florens' origin is "mongrelized" as her mother was broken in by the traders, a standard practice that institutes the widespread process of blood-crossing. The novel is framed by Florens' opening and her mother's closing chapter. In-between, an impersonal but intrusive narrator

intervenes. The space for the daughter's agency and voice, thus the very prerequisites of her story and history, are literally and symbolically provided by the mother, who exacts an act of mercy from an unwilling Protestant trader. Motherly devotion, a mother's act of unconditional love, grounds the daughter's existence and lays way for the entire story. Theirs is the communication that transcends the bounds of place and time. In a similar way, the intertwined voices of three women, Sethe and her two daughters, Denver and Beloved, form the closing choral section of *Beloved* (190–207). While *Beloved* still inclines more towards orally transmitted stories, *A Mercy* takes a more complex view of the matter. The latter novel is built on the intermingling of the oral and literary modes of story-telling. Even as Florens' urgent voice acts as a story-generating vehicle, in the end, she makes clear that her words need also to be written down. Her story, the story of the weird family in the New World semi-wilderness constituted by acts of random humanity and disrupted by equally gratuitous acts of human cruelty, moves between the urgency of being seen—that is, read—and the necessity of being heard (160–61).

Bridging the Gap

Avowedly, Morrison swerves between two positions in her assessment of literature and its role. At first, she seems to suggest that it is a language of universals. She says as much, for instance, in her Nobel speech prize, where she pronounces on the role and impact of literature primarily through its specific handling of language, while its meaning must also reside in and arise from an interaction between the writer and her audience ("Toni Morrison Nobel Lecture"). Secondly, however, she proposes that a universal critical, supposedly humanistic, position as a vantage point from which to evaluate texts is impossible and unfeasible: her world is genderized, sexualized, and racialized (Morrison, *Playing* 4). This is by way of rephrasing the dilemma outlined at the beginning of the text, namely, by questioning to what extent an African American female author breaks out of the mold of the marginal discourse and, more importantly, when does she reach that entitlement, Mor-

rison, clearly, has achieved this in a way that other African American, ethnic, and female authors could not dream of without having given up in the process on her particular characters and their peculiar plight.

In order to illuminate what might be for Morrison a productive give-and-take between the universal and the particular that we find in her texts, themes, narrative style, and language use, but most of all in her ideology, I would like to evoke Doris Sommer's concept of a resistant text, one that refuses to grant easy gratification to the reader. Sommer proposes this within the scope of "minority writing in the Americas," where she herself works with the spatial logic of marginality and centrality already evoked in my argument: "the powerful center can mistake its specificity for universality," so that it may take precisely "a resistant text" and its "ethico-aesthetic strategy" to break up this arrangement (Sommer, *Proceed* 8–10). A resistant text, according to Sommer's model, "announc[es] limited access," holds back information, refuses to alleviate the reader's limited understanding or competence, and "place[s] traditionally privileged readers beyond a border" (10). She also works with the term "particularist fictions," designating texts which enjoin us as readers to observe "an ethical distance from the object of desire," obviating a full hermeneutical disclosure of the text (31). In line with this, Sommer calls those writers "particularist[s]" who produce "reticent texts" containing "signs that make a political as well as an aesthetic difference" (15–16). This, in short, would be a very suitable description of Morrison's writing agenda.

In other words, Morrison's novels, by engaging an ethnic, and thus by default and convention a marginal, oblique, and unseen experience, in fact humanize and universalize it to such an extent that they ultimately make the issue of race and gender secondary to the notions of human psychology, emotionality, and cognition. In the process, however, they show how and why these "particulars" must be and have already been factored into our being in the world. One wonders whether this might not be one of Morrison's foremost achievements—allowing us to forget, at least for the duration of

reading, the more implacable conditions of our existence and enabling us to conjure the ways and modes in which we could exist and think otherwise, crossing the lines so that eventually we lose sense of presumed centers and proverbial margins.

Works Cited

Babb, Valerie. "'E Pluribus Unum?' The American Origins Narrative in Toni Morrison's A Mercy." *MELUS*, vol. 36, no. 2, Toni Morrison: New Directions, 2011, pp. 147–64.

Beavers, Herman. *Geography and the Political Imaginary in the Novels of Toni Morrison.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America.* The Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1998.

"Black Writers in Praise of Toni Morrison." *The New York Times.* 24 Jan. 1988, www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/11/home/15084.html. Accessed 14 March 2020.

Blaut, J. M. *Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*. The Guilford P, 1993.

Brown, Cecil, and Toni Morrison. "Interview with Toni Morrison." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1995, pp. 455–73.

Byerman, Keith. "Remembering History in Contemporary Black Literature and Criticism." *American Literary History*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1991, pp. 809–16.

Carby, Hazel. "Ideologies of Black Folk: The Historical Novel of Slavery." *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*, edited by Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989, pp. 125–43.

Castronovo, Russ. *Fathering the Nation: American Genealogies of Slavery and Freedom*. U of California P, 1996.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "Foreword by Ta-Nehisi Coates." *The Origin of Others*, by Toni Morrison, Harvard UP, 2017, pp. vii–xvii.

Cox, Sandra. "Mother Hunger: Trauma, Intra-Feminine Identification, and Women's Communities in Toni Morrison's Beloved, Paradise, and A Mercy." *Contested Boundaries: New Critical Essays on the Fiction of Toni Morrison*, edited by Maxine L. Montgomery, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 96–123.

Curtin, Philip D. *The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census.* The U of Wisconsin P, 1969.

Doyle, Laura. *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640-1940*. Duke UP, 2008.

Dubey, Madhu. *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*. Indiana UP, 1994.

---. *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism*. The U of Chicago P, 2003.

Eyerman, Ron. *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity.* Cambridge UP, 2001.

Fabre, Geneviève, and Robert O'Meally, editors. *History and Memory in African-American Culture*. Oxford UP, 1994.

Fisher, Philip. *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel*. Oxford UP, 1985.

Gates, David. "Original Sins. Review of A Mercy, by Toni Morrison." *New York Times Book Review*. 30 Nov. 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/books/review/Gates-t.html. Accessed 9 Apr. 2020.

Goldberg, David Theo. *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Blackwell, 1993.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford UP, 1997.

Henderson, Mae G. "Toni Morrison's Beloved: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text." *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*, edited by William L. Andrews and Nellie Y. McKay, Oxford UP, 1999, pp. 79–106.

Levander, Caroline F. *Where Is American Literature?* Wiley and Blackwell, 2013.

Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel* (excerpts). *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, edited by Michael McKeon, The Johns Hopkins UP, 2000, pp. 219–64.

McDowell, Deborah E. "Reading Family Matters." *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*, edited by Cheryl Wall, Rutgers UP, 1989, pp. 75–97.

McDowell, Deborah E., and Arnold Rampersad, editors. *Slavery and the Literary Imagination*. The Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.

McKay, Nellie, and Toni Morrison. "An Interview with Toni Morrison." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1983, pp. 413–29.

Mitgang, Herbert. "For Morrison, Prize Silences Gossip." *The New York Times*. 1 Apr. 1988, www.nytimes.com/books/98/01/11/home/15522.html. Accessed 14 March 2020.

Montgomery, Maxine L. *Contested Boundaries: New Critical Essays on the Fiction of Toni*

Morrison. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved.* 1987. Penguin, 2000.

---. "A Bench by the Road: *Beloved*." *The World*, Jan/Feb 1989, pp. 4–5, 37–41.

---. *A Mercy. A Novel*. Alfred Knopf, 2008.

---. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. 1992. Vintage Books, 1993.

---. "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation*, edited by Mari Evans, Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1984, pp. 339–45.

---. "Toni Morrison Nobel Lecture." 7 Dec. 1993, www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/. Accessed 15 June 2020.

Moynihan, Daniel P. "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." U.S. Department of Labor, March 1965, www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/webid-moynihan. Accessed 27 Aug. 2020.

Mudgett, Kathryn. "The Natural and Legal Geographies of the Body: Law's Corpus Written on the Lives of Sethe and Florens." *Contested Boundaries: New Critical Essays on the Fiction of Toni Morrison*, edited by Maxine L. Montgomery, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 67–80.

Nelson, Dana. *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*. Duke UP, 1998.

Nicol, Kathryn, and Jennifer Terry. "Guest Editors' Introduction. Toni Morrison: New Directions." *MELUS*, vol. 36, no. 2, Toni Morrison: New Directions, 2011, pp. 7–12.

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s. 2nd ed.* Routledge, 1994.

Page, Philip. *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*. UP of Mississippi, 1995.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *Southern History across the Color Line*. The U of North Carolina P, 2002.

Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Harvard UP, 1982.

Rody, Caroline. T*he Daughter's Return: African-American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History*. Oxford UP, 2001.

Rosenfeld, Paul. "Why America Needs a Slavery Museum." *The Atlantic*. 25 Aug. 2015, www.theatlantic.com/video/index/402172/the-only-american-museum-about-

slavery/. Accessed 1 July 2020.

Rushdy, Ashraf. "Daugthers Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *American Literature*, vol. 64, no. 3, 1992, pp. 567–97.

---. *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*. Oxford UP, 1999.

Sandy, Mark. "'Cut by Rainbow': Tales, Tellers, and Reimagining Wordsworth's Pastoral Poetics in Toni Morrison's Beloved and A Mercy." *MELUS*, vol. 36, no. 2, Toni Morrison: New Directions, 2011, pp. 35–51.

Sommer, Doris. *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. U of California P, 1991.

---. *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas.* Harvard UP, 1999.

Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2. Culture and Countermemory: The "American" Connection, 1987, pp. 64–81.

Stepto, Robert, and Toni Morrison. "'Intimate Things in Place': A Conversation with Toni Morrison." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1977, pp. 473–89.

Tally, Justine, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison.* Cambridge UP, 2007.

Tedder, Charles. "Post-Racialism and Its Discontents: The Pre-National Scene in Toni Morrison's A Mercy." *Contested Boundaries: New Critical Essays on the Fiction of Toni Morrison*, edited by Maxine L. Montgomery, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 144–59.

Uncensored: Toni Morrison. Films for the Humanities and Sciences. Dir. Gary Deans. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1998.

"The United States National Slavery Museum." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 10 Sept. 2020, 2:39 UTC, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_National_Slavery_Museum. Accessed 5 July 2020.

Wagner Martin, Linda. *Toni Morrison: A Literary Life.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Wall, Cheryl. "Toni Morrison: editor and teacher." *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, edited by Justine Tally, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 139–48.

Yates, Frances A. *The Art of Memory*. The U of Chicago P, 1966.

Ying, Zhu. *Fiction and the Incompleteness of History: Toni Morrison, V.S. Naipaul, and Ben*

Contributors

Tatjana Bijelić is Professor at the University of Banja Luka, where she teaches several courses in British and American Literature. Her fields of research include modern and contemporary literatures in English, migrant and transnational writing, and creative writing. She has published widely, including scholarly work, translation, and three award-winning poetry collections. Her most recent publications include *Dickinsonian Intonations in Modern Poetry* (2018). She has been a Fulbright Visiting Scholar (Columbia University, 2014/5) and a Weiser Fellow (University of Michigan, 2019).

Stipe Grgas is Professor of American Studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. Before 2005, he taught for more than twenty years at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zadar and was guest lecturer at English departments of other Croatian universities (Rijeka, Split). He has published four books – two on Irish topics and two on American literature and culture – edited two, and written more than a hundred scholarly articles. Besides literary issues, he has worked in the interdisciplinary field of human spatiality and cultural studies. His most recent work explores the overlap of economics and literature. These themes have been the focus of his lecturing in postgraduate courses. He has been a guest lecturer abroad and has been awarded two Fulbright scholarships (Yale, Cornell).

Tatjana Jukić is Professor of English Literature in the Department of English at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, where she teaches Victorian literature and arts, and film studies. She also teaches in the doctoral programs of Comparative Literature and of Croatian Language and Literature, and has been invited to lecture on literary history and theory by universities and research institutes in Europe and the United States. Jukić is the author of two books: *Liking, Dislike, Supervision: Literature and the Visual in Victorian Britain* (2002) and *Revolution and Melancholia: Limits of Literary Memory* (2011).

Jelena Šesnić is Full Professor of American Studies in the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. A recipient of several grants (Fulbright, European Association for American Studies, John F. Kennedy Institute), she has authored two books and edited and co-edited two collections of essays. She is a co-founder and currently the president of the Croatian Association for American Studies, a co-organizer of the annual Zagreb American Studies Workshops, and vice-president of the Association for American

Studies in South-Eastern Europe. Her current research deals with the Anglophone Croatian diaspora in a global context, while she is also involved in the University of Zagreb project Transatlantic Literature and Bio-Crises in the Long 19th Century.